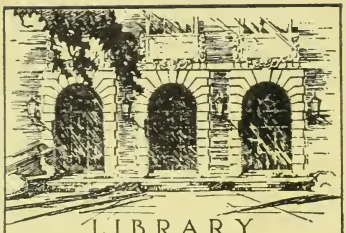
MR NOBODY

MRS JOHN KENT SPENDER



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MR. NOBODY.

VOL. II.

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MR. NOBODY

BY

MRS. JOHN KENT SPENDER

AUTHOR OF

"GODWYN'S ORDEAL," "BOTH IN THE WRONG,"
"HER OWN FAULT," "PARTED LIVES,"

ETC. ETC.

"It is amazing how small a beam of light redeems a soul from the condemnation of utter darkness."

HARTLEY COLERIDGE.

"All things tend upwardly, though weak
Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
But dream of him, and guess where he may be,
And do their best to climb and get to him—
All this I knew not, and I failed."

ROBERT BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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1884.

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PART III.

(CONTINUED.)

Oh, my brothers, men, my brothers,
You are mine and I am yours,
I am yours to cheer and succour,
I am yours for hope and aid.
Lo, my hand to raise and stay you,
Lo, my arm to guard and keep.

CLOUGH.

MR. NOBODY.

CHAPTER VIII.

REUBEN was so little given to analysing his own thoughts that he could not calculate the effect of the announcement of his new project upon that much greater mystery—the mind of his son. Yet he was so pleased with himself when a satisfactory letter arrived a few days afterwards from Sir Ralph that he could not resist immediately beating about the bush by drawing the conversation confidentially in the direction of women, considerably to Godfrey's mystification. For, whatever weaknesses his father might have had in the past, he had

always supposed him to be free from a tendency to foolish adulation of the fairer sex. Indeed, Reuben had more than once given him to understand that his own experiences amongst women had been singularly unfortunate, and that he had never known more than two in his whole life who were worth their salt, one of those, of course, being Godfrey's mother. He had seemed to have no heart for women, and did not wish his life to be brightened or adorned by them. He had more than once sarcastically repeated the talk of the Torringmoor ladies, showing himself implacable to their gossipping ways, and declaring that the English women were humbugging fools, and had too much leisure by half in which to abuse their neighbours.

'I'd set them to make shirts, or to scrub the floors; 'twould cure them o' tongue-wagging,' said Reuben, with a fierceness which was singularly ungrateful, considering that more than one lady, with the recollection of the possibility of a second marriage for the rich man, had been courteous and condescending in her efforts to please. 'Depend upon it,' he had added

cynically, 'the whole pack of 'em are up to mischief with their twaddle. Chatter, chatter, chitter, chitter, 'tis all the time, just as if a lot o' swallows were gettin' ready for their flight, when you have women-folk in the house.'

Godfrey had never thought of asking where his father had swallowed his nauseous doses of experience, or whether this sad account was merely theoretical. If he had been consulted, he might have given his own opinion that the companionship of a good and noble woman was one of the most potent influences by which a man might 'move upwards, working out the beast.' But he had not cared to discuss the matter, and had been contented by the way in which Reuben always ended his comments, 'Now your mother was one as always knew how to hold her tongue.'

The young man's surprise was therefore great when—wishing to escape from the dinner-table after a certain time, as was generally his habit, that he might find his way outside, and smoke a quiet cigar under a sky luminous with

stars—Reuben detained him, and commenced a homily on the advantages of an early marriage. He was still more astonished when his father enlarged, after his own fashion, on the attractions of a 'jewel of a girl,' whom he had seen lately, and who had eyes like blue speedwell, with dark pupils in them, and hair like that described by Burns when he sang about 'the lassie wi' the lintwhite locks.' Reuben pronounced it 'Bur-rns' with a triumphant roll of the 'r,' which he had learnt from a Scotchman.

(The neighbours might not have considered him quite so matter-of-fact, if they knew how he studied his Burns as well as his Shakespeare.)

'Would you like me to tell ye who the wench may be?'

'I do not see that it signifies,' answered Godfrey, seating himself a little unwillingly—feeling as if the whole thing jarred unnaturally with his father's merciless condemnation of girls. 'I was thinking—it might—be too soon—after your dinner.'

'Ah, you are a sly dog! One would think I

had the gout,' chuckled Reuben, with imperturbable good-humour, as he passed the claret which looked rosy through the venetian glass of a dainty jug. 'One might suppose that you would be interested to hear what a short distance divides ye from such a dainty piece of God's work. When a man has no longer any teeth in his mouth, he outgrows the toothache. Mine are a'ready scarce within hail of unanother, like so many milestones. But you—in the heyday of life——'

And the fastidious Godfrey winced as he saw from the twinkle in his father's eyes that he was again inclined to administer to him a thundering slap between the shoulders.

'I see,' he said, quickly, 'you are afraid that I shall think it necessary to go through epidemics of love-nonsense just as if I were again to be nursed through measles and hooping-cough. Don't trouble yourself. Even if such were to be the case, reason would resume its sway, after a period of abdication, and I should not make myself a greater ass than the majority of mankind.'

'And yet *you* prate o' the poets, and write some o' the stuff yerself.'

'No, I don't, but poets woo with vows that are imaginary, and their skin-deep wounds are healed directly they leave their scribbling.'

Reuben sat with his chin propped up on his hand. What would happen if this 'vis inertiæ' could not be overcome? He saw for the first time that he had not properly calculated on the tongue-paralysing indifference of this young heart-whole Sir Galahad, who did not even question him as to the whereabouts of his phœnix. If the way in which he had hitherto approached the subject proved to be repugnant to his son's refined nature, what would Godfrey's scruples be when he unfolded his projects a little further?

Yet Reuben prided himself on never being defeated. He suddenly made a false move, dictated by his energy and his semi-despair. Pulling a distended-looking purse from his pocket, he commenced eagerly counting out a heap of notes; and, pushing them towards his son, he said,

'You have odd ideas of your own. You should spend money a little more. What is it you would like? New horses? new books? a shooting-box? a journey to Rome? more pictures? you've but to ask and have.'

'Thank you for your kind intentions,' said Godfrey, colouring violently, 'but I am loaded with so many good things already that it seems to me sometimes I can hardly breathe under them. I have enough of everything and to spare. It is a hot-bed of idleness as it is. I did not ask for such luxuries—you mean them kindly. But cannot you put yourself in my place? I might be as eager as you were if I were just setting out in life with a vista of possible wealth opening before me, but now——'

His dislike of wounding other people's feelings restrained him suddenly in his speech. He *could* not tell his father that he had no sense of elevation in inheriting his wealth, and that it was with self-mockery that he consented to sit still and do nothing.

'Of course I don't expect to launch out in a grand scale on my own account, neither should

I like it,' he said, more quietly, with the involuntary flush still lingering on his cheeks, and not without a sense of humour, which sometimes in these encounters stood him in good stead.

There was a certain independence about his attitude, as he sat with his legs crossed, his arms folded, and his head a little thrown back, that alarmed his father and determined him at once to make the necessary plunge.

'Do you know why I wished ye to stay and talk about this to-night? Can't you guess? I want you to think about marrying—soon.'

There was a silence. Godfrey was not what is called a ready man, and the aggressiveness of his father's sudden announcement seemed to have stupified him.

'Surely there is no hurry,' he said, after a pause. 'Plenty of time for that.'

'Well, lad, you must think o' me. What d'ye think I worked for, if not for the founding of a family? I have been waiting to find you the right mate.'

Confused recollections passed through God-

frey's brain of Scott working for Abbotsford and other like memories, which seemed to form a comical contrast to Reuben's ambition.

'In royal families it might be thought necessary to marry, but I don't think we need trouble about ours,' he said, a little drily.

'And it's royalty, or something like it, I'm aiming at for you.'

Godfrey could no longer control his laughter.

'You talk in riddles.'

'The riddles are easy to read. Blue eyes, yellow head, straight as a larch, and one o' the oldest families in England. A girl whose father would have been a baronet.'

Godfrey blushed like a woman; then a shadow of a smile—as if his lips curled in scorn in spite of his resolve—hovered about the lower part of his face. Otherwise the expression was one of intense resoluteness.

'Apparently you have a purpose. Cannot I have a purpose too? There is something which I don't understand between you and this neighbour of yours.'

'He sees as plainly as I do the importance of uniting the two families.'

'I wonder how he would like it, if we were to offer a wife to him.'

Reuben laughed now, rather a coarse, loud laugh, which brought the blood again into his son's face. The elder man meant nothing by it. The education on the one side and the want of it on the other, made it impossible for either of these two souls to overcome the formidable barrier which forbade anything like free interchange of sentiment. Reuben knew nothing of the chivalrous feeling in Godfrey's heart which disturbed his quiet self-possession, and made him hotly indignant that such a compromise could be even named.

'Excuse me. It seems to me that you are taking advantage of this man; for what purpose I cannot conceive.'

'I am doing him a good turn.'

'And an ill turn to his niece. Excuse me again, but it seems to me that a girl's name should not be brought into this matter.'

'Her uncle can answer for her.'

'I am truly obliged to him.

'She is in love with the money, poor girl,' said

Godfrey, in an aside to himself. 'Pity she can't have it to pay the family debts. But to offer her the money hampered with an encumbrance —no.' He said aloud, a little stiffly, 'I am sorry I cannot please you. Sir Ralph would hardly wish me to make a victim of his niece.'

He remembered with a fresh pang of repugnance, even as he made the remark, that the supposed 'victims' in nine cases out of ten, where money is concerned, are ready to sacrifice themselves, and fully to appreciate the advantages of an unlimited income, including unlimited accounts at the jeweller's and the milliner's. The girl who could consent to a compact of this kind would be of a type which he hated. Nothing should induce him to marry her.

'You are mistaken about Sir Ralph,' said Reuben, hoarsely, and Godfrey began to be sorry for the look of disappointment in his father's face. 'A duck couldn't take to the water more quickly than he has taken to the idea o' you young ones making it up between ye.'

'I am afraid I am not fit for such high "mating," as you call it,' answered Godfrey, with scarcely veiled scorn in his voice. 'Bold women who take readily to the *rôle* of modern Iphigenias to please impecunious uncles have too much tragi-comedy about them for me. I would rather give my love to some simple, low-born girl.'

'When you see her, you'll pipe another tune.'

'Not unless you spill some love-philtre over me to rob me of my senses. *I* to be the one to find the money, and my wife to bring with her fine ways and old blood! I have no desire to spoil the compactness of the Rashleigh family tree! Really, it is time such ideas about marriage should have exploded!'

'I have set my mind on it,' said his father, still more huskily. 'I give you notice that *my son* can only marry so.'

'No—now—you are making the thing ridiculous! You can't get people to marry in this country by driving them to it. It may be different in France, but I am told the thing is becoming less common even there—quite the

"Adelphi Theatre" style of thing. You are playing us a practical joke,' said Godfrey, as he attempted a wry smile.

'The intimation of my wishes cannot be looked upon as——'

'As coercion—certainly not; no one dreamed of such a monstrosity. I reserve the privilege of doing as I please with my own life. Of course you would not wish me to take the matter seriously,' added the lad, with an effort which made him for the first time really awkward both in manner and in speech. He bent down his head, that his father should not see the hot colour coming and going on his cheeks, and then—not waiting for further parley—he escaped abruptly into the darkness, and stood alone beneath the starlit sky, drawing long breaths, as if they were necessary to him, of the fresh, pure night air.

CHAPTER IX.

It was not often that Godfrey lingered with his sketching materials in his father's grounds. He preferred the stirring breezes which swept over the moor, with the sense of space conveyed by its receding distances. Many a time had he tried to dash-in with full brush the masses of wild and flying cloud—in ranges first of all compact, tier under tier, and then with their valves suddenly opening, pouring out tender mists amidst golden glimpses of sunshine. Aristophanes did well, Godfrey used to say, laughingly, to exhibit his philosopher in a basket in the clouds, though Socrates showed that he knew nothing about art when he inquired ironically if people could gain anything

by contemplation of the heavens, and if they could make cloud and sunshine whenever they pleased.

But on the morning after his conversation with his father, he seemed to be out of tune for philosophising on the moors, and sought in preference one of those retired nooks still to be found in the out-of-the-way corners of Reuben's estate, where Nature had been left to her own vagaries, simply because the landscape gardeners were for once at a loss as to how to 'improve her.' The spot had been called the 'wilderness' when it had belonged to the Rashleighs. There was a sound of water in it like that which you hear in Switzerland. For little rivulets travelling for miles over hills and moor, through ravines and dingles, past woods and mossy stones, gurgling and chattering as they went, had here found for themselves a level in the lake which Reuben had talked of draining. It would be a difficult and expensive matter to drain it, involving the damming up of numerous smaller ducts; for the little streams, which looked brown and green

under the overhanging foliage, came rushing in collected force to the lake, shooting over smooth masses of stone, or creeping in narrow, pebbly passages.

Next to the wildness of the open moor, Godfrey loved this bowery enclosure, with its dancing leaf-shadows and stem-shadows, as here and there a sunbeam forced its way through the tangled branches of fir, larch, beech, or oak, and glittered in sparkles of emerald and topaz on the embrowned surface of the stream. The water itself, with its ever-moving fringes of creamy foam, and its endless variety of detail and colour, had alternately fascinated Godfrey, and driven him to despair in the attempts which he had made more than once to represent it with its reflections, its shadows, its curves, and its dimples, its ripples, and its lines of light.

'I am nothing but a ridiculous dilettante,' he said to himself, puffing at his cigar as if in contempt of his own absurdity, as once more he set himself to study the rich colours and individual forms which had baffled him before.

'It really doesn't much matter, as I don't mean to show the daub to any creature on earth.'

But, after a few minutes of intense application, the very outline seemed to mock him, to say nothing of the witchery of colour that lurked in the brown earth-banks, the old roots curiously twisted, the play of sunbeams on the stones, and the miracle of multitudinous leafage overhead. He had been so little accustomed to persevere with anything lately that he soon threw down his brush with a sigh of impatience at what he condemned as his own impotence.

'I don't need anyone to tell me I am not a Turner,' he muttered, as he drew out another piece of paper, and this time began lazily pencilling the tufts of feathery grass and the petals of the elegantly-bending forget-me-nots, of the colour which the Chinese ceramic artists have introduced into their vases—calling it 'sky-after-rain.' The forget-me-nots, with the waving grass and the purple lythrum, which hung over the surface of the water, and the dainty ferns, which had found root-room either on mossy tablets of rock, earthy ledges, or the wider bank, occu-

pied him for the next quarter of an hour.

'Ah, the buds of the forget-me-nots are distinctly pink,' he said to himself. Then, in another fit of self-mockery, he added, 'I wonder how humanity will be benefited by my testing of that discovery—for the observation is not even mine—I don't know that any observation or *any* special talent is mine, except a genius for drifting and letting my chances go by. However, it seems as if it will be all the same, whether I spend my time in smoking tobacco, playing billiards, or cramming up science. Whatever happens, it appears that I belong to Broadmeads, to be treated generously or meanly as if I were a sort of human skittle. I can't roll away from the property, whether I love it or hate it. There is only one comfort, that I belong to the people, written, as some one says, with a capital P—why, I can't claim the originating even of that feeble joke—but if this property comes to me I will not be a selfish wretch about it, a sort of slaveholder as my father will be, emancipating the blacks and treading down the whites—I will break through—— Oh—h—h!'

Godfrey's father would have used some stronger expletive. But the lad had been brought up in an atmosphere in which swearing is considered ungentlemanly, and his fastidious nature loathed the habit as contemptible and vulgar. Yet he suddenly manifested certain signs of uneasiness, dropping the cigar—which he still held in the fingers of his left hand, having allowed it to go out again after having taken the trouble to light it—and trying to make his dimensions as small as possible that he might hide himself without changing his position beneath the branches of a spreading beech-tree. He was disconcerted when he found that six feet of flesh and blood were not so easily packed into small compass.

'They will see me to a certainty,' he reflected. And to a shy man, who had meant to enjoy the pleasures of solitude, the reflection, to say the least of it, was disconcerting. For by the margin of the stream, just where an oblique band of sunlight was slanting across the path, came tripping a bright-eyed, dark-haired child—a child so graceful and yet so tiny in the per-

fect proportions of her little figure that through the dim medium of the overshadowing trees it might have been possible to mistake her for a spirit rather than a child, so ethereal and intangible was the sudden apparition. The immaterial idea which Godfrey had first of all connected with the little creature was further carried out by a picturesque style of dress which suited her fantastic beauty. A wreath of briony had been wound round her curly locks. A bunch of roses had been arranged on her light muslin dress. She carried her hat as a basket which was filled with wild-flowers.

'Oh, if Millais could paint that picture, it would add another to his unique portrait-gallery of children—some of the few faithful and original works which the age has produced,' thought the amateur artist, as his eye followed the dancing, elf-like little one.

If the child had been alone, it might have been possible to make friends with her, or to coax her to let him murder her beauty on spoilt paper. But there, apparently, was the *governess*.

'A *lady*, certainly,' reflected Godfrey, not

using the word in its liberal and catholic sense. as he would have used it had there been occasion, even to a woman at the washing-tub, but unconsciously in its narrower, more conventional sense. A lady, yes, a perfect gentlewoman—clear-eyed, clear-skinned, straight-waisted, straight-stepping, looking quietly before her with her passionless, guileless eyes, not the least disconcerted by the sight of himself, or at the thought of—did she know it?—that she was trespassing.

But then her dress! The theory of the age had not yet been defined as 'Darwinism tempered with *La Follet*.' But Godfrey had been brought too often into contact with girls who could dress ridiculously not to see that there was something queer and shabby in this girl's attire. He had witnessed the apotheosis of the Dolly Varden, if not of the princess robe, and had had in his short life just sufficient experience of the 'girl of the period'—who had a knack of asserting herself not only by her talk but by her love of personal adornment—to see that there was something odd in the

washed-out cotton dress, large, ribbonless, flapping hat, and cotton gloves of this young lady. Doubtless, she must be one of those strong-minded people whose greatness of soul had taught her that it would be impossible to look heroic in frills and furbelows, and that it was more easy to invest a faded cotton-gown with mystery and romance.

She might be Tennyson's gardener's daughter—her colouring was beautiful enough for the part. He was not so sure about the expression of the face; she was probably one of the women who talk philosophy and go-in for examinations. Well, after all, that was a move in the right direction—sure to be a little exaggerated, like all reactions, at first, but better, all things considered, than the curate-worshipping girl, who had only one type of male perfection, or the modern Venus who painted her face and pinched her waist.

Godfrey thought it his duty to rise. He would have to do the polite to this little child, who, with her governess, had wandered into his father's grounds. It was not much in his way. He

had never yet been *en rapport* with anyone of the sex, and, not having a mother or sisters, was never quite sure that he had said the right thing when he addressed one of Eve's daughters.

But, before he emerged from his partial concealment, the child had slipped past him, and was kneeling down by the lake, while the elder girl followed slowly, not deigning to turn her head to look at Godfrey, a flush on her cheek being the only sign that she was aware of his proximity.

'Leave the flowers alone, Dot; they look so pretty where they are. And I am afraid the grass is too damp for you to float your paper boats,' she said, as she followed the child, and raised her from an attitude which would be sure to spoil her frock.

A few minutes before, Godfrey had been unreasonably irritated at the discovery that his lazy delight in that lullaby of waters and twittering of birds was to be somewhat interfered with. But there was something in that woman's voice which brought the first brightness

of a spring day with it, and reminded him of the warbling of his favourite songsters. He forgot the deep shadows on the water, the air spicy with the aromatic odours from the trees, the penetrating perfume of the meadow-sweet, and began to meditate about that voice.

'Now, if I were ever to write a novel, I should talk stuff about a voice, I know I should. They all do it *ad nauseam*. But this is certainly a very curious, unusual type of voice—power in it, and yet, *elle est bien femme*, as the French say. I wonder whether it means anything at all. Not, "What's in a name?" but what's in a voice?' he said, exasperated again in a most inconsistent way by a feeling that this girl was altogether ignoring his presence.

He raised himself slowly—a little languidly and lazily—for he knew that it was one of Reuben's crotchets to wage war with trespassers on his own domain. He always considered it desirable, whenever it was possible to do so, to avoid bandying words with his father, and yet, in a matter which involved politeness to

a lady, he would be ready to vindicate his own quixotic chivalry.

'Allow me,' he said, coming forward and raising his hat. 'The flowers are just near enough to the water to make it scarcely safe for her to reach them. And as to floating paper boats, they will be all swamped, if she tries to do it for herself. It will be quite easy for me to help her.'

The young lady, whose face had attracted him the moment before, returned his bow with—was it possible?—a look of unwillingness. It was as if a shadow had suddenly fallen on her, as she fixed her beautiful eyes on him, almost as if she did not see him, but was looking through him and beyond him, thinking out some train of thought.

Godfrey's pale cheek flushed.

'Thanks,' she said, a little coldly. And he, gazing still at her face, saw a dignity which was unexpected in it, and which somehow made him ill at ease. 'Thank you for your kind offer, but we have no need of the forget-me-nots.'

And before the young man could get over the impression of being thoroughly and unmistakably snubbed, and that by a lady who was trespassing in his own grounds, and to whom he had intended to be polite, she had called again, with a slight trembling in her voice owing to some agitation which he did not understand,

'Dot, come here when I tell you, or I shall be angry. Leave the forget-me-nots, naughty child, or I must come and fetch you.'

Perhaps it was the unusual imperiousness of tone which jarred upon the nerves of an evidently spoiled child. But the little one, far from moving, stamped her foot with an angry gesture, pointing at the flowers with her forefinger, her pretty face convulsed with passion.

'Pray allow me,' said Godfrey again, 'she has evidently set her mind on those forget-me-nots, it will be so easy to get them for her.'

And, before she had time to expostulate, Godfrey—who could no more endure to see a child's pretty features transformed with rage,

than he could hear of details in the controversy about vivisection—was wading two or three feet deep in the muddy water, regardless of his polished boots and one of Poole's best-fitting suits. He returned with his hands filled with the forget-me-nots, golden moneywort, and purple lythrum.

Dot held out her arms for them, but he shook his head.

'No, they will soil your pretty dress. I am sure your governess will kindly carry them.' For she whom he called the governess had now come up to them, and he had time again to remark her splendid physique, the healthiness of her cheek, the well-poised head, and the elastic movements of her limbs—showing that she had been brought up in no hot-house atmosphere.

'A daughter of the people—and how superior to the sluggish creatures with gaslit colouring, who are so languid in their movements and whose veins are so ill-fed with blood that they can only talk affectedly,' he was thinking to himself admiringly, as he said, holding the

flowers out of the child's reach and smiling at the older girl,

'You will take them for her, I am sure. The stalks are not dirty—only a little wet.'

'And they will not soil *my* dress. Oh, yes, I will take them,' she answered, with a smile which began in her eyes, but seemed scarcely to have reached her lips, before her little charge, with new and unreasonable wrath—puckering her small forehead into fresh furrows—cried, in shrill anger,

'She is not my governess.'

'Caprice, thy name is woman,' thought Godfrey, with wide open eyes, 'what have I done to offend them now, that they are ready to put out thorns again like a pair of porcupines?'

'I am sure we are very much obliged to you,' said Vere, as she held out her hand for the flowers. 'And it is quite true—I do—teach my cousin.'

'Oh!'—disconcerted, he scarcely knew why—for he was one who believed in the dignity of labour, and thought that a gentlewoman was no

less truly a gentlewoman because she made use of her talents to serve her generation. 'This is surely the proudest woman in the world, but it is tomfoolery for her to be mortally hurt because I took her for a governess,' he said to himself. And then aloud, with the usual untruthfulness which is supposed to elevate educated people in matters of courtesy above the plain-speaking of savages,

'I am sorry. I beg a thousand pardons.'

'What for? Because I teach my little cousin?' she said, so simply and straightforwardly that he could scarcely have a suspicion that she was laughing at him when she looked so innocent. 'I can't say I can't grasp your meaning.'

Meanwhile he had been carefully wiping the flowers with his white pocket-handkerchief, and was about to hand them to her before he answered, when a new and unaccountable change came over the little creature who still stood as if planted by the lake.

She had been listening to the few words which had passed, fixing a pair of bright,

keen eyes first on Godfrey, and then on her own companion—surveying them both as if she were a little person accustomed to comprehensive criticism, and determined to detect why her cousin had held back with an involuntary horror of meeting some one when she had that morning suggested that they should float paper boats in the old lake. Suddenly she seemed to have found the clue; for, with authority, she stretched out her little arm, and shouted, not a whit mollified by her cousin's entreating looks,

'Go away, naughty man; you had no right to come here and steal my papa's pretty places.'

Godfrey was silent and annoyed. His cheeks became aflame as a new light broke in upon him. And his confusion was reflected in Vere's expressive face.

'Forgive her,' she said, pleadingly, 'the story is common property; she must have heard other people talk about it—and, you know, they *will* put their own colouring on things. We should not have ventured here,

had I known that we should intrude upon you.'

He still held the flowers.

'Spare me,' she said, 'and keep them. Oh, I do think the child is right! What would *your* father say if he knew that we, of all people in the world, had robbed him of his flowers? There is said to be a passion for possessing things in your family.'

'You are pleased to be sarcastic. I daresay it is excellent discipline for me to find that people can be rough on me for offences committed before I was born. But really you might soften the heart of your little cousin, and persuade her to take the things which caused me some amount of inconvenience to pick.'

It was Vere's turn to blush. She had intended to preserve a strict incognita, but the child's exclamation had deprived her of her prudence, and now—it was her own fault—she had put herself in the wrong.

'I did not mean to be impolite. Oh! you can give her the flowers; they will not hurt her frock. It was washed at home, and I

—I ironed it myself. I daresay you think me proud, but I have enough to make me humble. I cannot even afford to sit still and listen, day after day, to my uncle's forebodings. I promised her mother on her deathbed that Dorothy at least should be properly cared for, and always look nice.'

There was suppressed passion in the speech, and he interpreted it correctly as less of a confidence than uttered in heat and pain, and aimed in some way at himself.

'If I might presume to offer sympathy—' he began, impulsively.

'How can you offer it? You are a perfect stranger,' she answered, regaining her calmness, and smiling at him as if she had been accustomed to smile at people all her life. 'I know you mean kindly. You can give Dot the flowers, and that will be quite what they call romantic.'

'We are neighbours more than strangers,' he continued, speaking rapidly, determined not to be left 'out in the cold' in this fashion, and therefore ignoring the somewhat stiff little bow

which she was beginning to make to him in token of farewell. 'I was just going to say that it is nonsense about forebodings. Why in the world should an earthquake come to your uncle? Why should not the close of his life be happier than the beginning? We have both had some of the same misfortunes; I also have lost a mother—and——'

She checked him by a look which, for the instant, brought back his shyness. The passing touch of her astonishment made him for the first time discern that he had done something unconventional. And yet, was it not her fault? Had she not felt uncomfortable the moment after she had unwittingly spoken of the death of Dorothy's mother, recalling the own mother who was more to *her* than a shadow—a memory ever living, sometimes causing her tears, sometimes brighter outlooks to the better country further on?

'You mean kindly,' she said, once more, 'but I don't like consoling speeches.'

'Don't let your uncle have forebodings. I am sure there can be no possible cause.'

'You might guess that the cause of his trouble is simple enough,' she said, 'glancing at her dress, the plainness of which gave significance to her speech.

'Are you really one of those who think that happiness depends on riches?'

'I told you I did not like consoling maxims,' she said, a little impatiently, 'they may do to put in books, but they won't bear pulling to pieces. Riches *do* confer happiness, it is nonsense to say they don't.'

'There is a higher happiness with which I fancy they have nothing to do.'

She answered him with raised eyebrows and a slightly cynical shrug of the shoulders. Her expression seemed to say, 'That is sentiment. I should not have expected that sort of poetry from your father's son;' or it would be truer to say that his sensitiveness interpreted her meaning as such.

He bowed in his turn somewhat coldly, and she, calling to her cousin, turned to retrace her steps by the pathway which wound beside the beck.

'You forget,' he said, 'it is a long way round by the bridge which leads to the fields, and just close by there is a door that leads straight into your park.'

'Guarded by chains and bolts,' she answered, 'thanks to your father. Yet to-day some of your men left it open.'

'How prejudiced you are against him! Nothing is easier than to undo the bolts.'

'And run the risk of a lawsuit,' she replied, with another bow and the air of one accustomed to give neat little retorts.

Godfrey had had little experience of women, except of those who fawned on him as the heir of an immense property. He had fancied himself 'shy' because he had been spoilt by women, 'buttered,' as he would have called it, by their flatteries. But, though this girl had seemed at first inclined to be resentful, a sort of freemasonry which neither had been able to avoid had already been established between them.

'Oh, you are too hard on us,' he said. And both of them laughed.

It is not until people have received a certain amount of education, or till there is some sort of mutual understanding that they can afford to laugh. If we did not laugh when there is a sort of crisis at times, there would be more quarrellings and heart-burnings, and more weeping philosophers. Godfrey laughed, and Vere laughed, the former till the tears stood in his eyes, and the laughter did something to clear the uncomfortable atmosphere.

'It is very stupid, but you know we may be taken up for trespassers.'

'You *really* think it? You really thought it possible that you might see a coarse brute with red face, barring your passage. My father is not a bit like that,' said the young man, suddenly becoming grave, and looking at her without a sign of evasiveness in his affable face.

'He believes it,' she thought, shaking her head, 'it will take him a long time to know his father. His is evidently one of those sweet-tempered natures which are too often wanting in will. I wonder how long it will take to

shake him out of his complacency, his content.'

Aloud she said,

'No, I thank you. It is not my way to ask favours. I prefer to go by the way in which we came, as you are quite sure we shall not have a bailiff after us. Tell your man not to leave open the door again, if he does not wish us to claim a right to come through it.'

'I trust you will always claim that right. My father pulled down the other bridge to save disputes. But I am very sorry he did it.'

'I did not mean to intrude into your father's private reasons. We Rashleighs are not supposed to be versed in the secrets of your family.'

The tone in which she answered was so decisive that he did not speak again.

He sat down once more on the grass when she had gone, and tried to occupy himself again with pencilling little scraps of scenery which might be useful to him in his studio. But that 'wise passiveness' in a man's heart which is said to be necessary for the full revelation of beauty had utterly deserted him for the day.

The significance taught by Wordsworth of the simplest things, did not seem to be as real to him as usual. But, instead, his memory was troubled with a couplet,

> 'Then felt I as some watcher of the skies,
> When a new planet swims into his ken.'

'She likes the forget-me-nots—the child will probably bring her again,' he said to himself, as he closed his portfolio, determining that, in future, modern sanitary reform should be to him as a red rag to a bull, whenever his father talked of draining that lake and doing away with the wild flowers.

The prize was certainly great, but he must move cautiously. Allowing as little as possible for the influence of artificial distinctions, here was a girl who was not to be easily moulded to anyone's hand. To think of winning her by the ordinary baits would be unutterable insanity.

'Good heavens,' he muttered to himself, 'how I blundered! I ought to have guessed at first that my father was fibbing atrociously when he talked of her as ready to fling herself at anyone's head. I ought to have known that the

very sight of anyone of the name of Sellwood would be likely to make her sore and miserable. I ought to have known she was in trouble. How atrociously cold she must have thought me!'

CHAPTER X.

'It is just a question of time as to when that little petulant rogue, who is so determined to have her own way, brings her cousin here again to float her paper-boats,' said Godfrey to himself, not ill-pleased at the idea.

He left the garden-door unlocked, forgetting that Dot, who had shown herself so intolerant of contradiction, and who had listened to the conversation between himself and Vere, would be likely to find her way alone when she chose through the unfastened door. By his carelessness he proved that he knew little of children. For had he not lingered in the sleepy hollow himself, preferring—in a new frame of mind in which everything seemed vague and undefined

—to listen to the murmur of the waters and the soughing of the trees, instead of amusing himself on the more open moor, the comedy might have been turned into a tragedy.

He was busy as usual one morning over some pencilled notes when a shriek, and a slight splash like that of a big water-rat, roused him to the discovery of the child who was in imminent danger of drowning in the lake. It would have been impossible to have seen Vere to better advantage than when, with a suspicion of moisture in her velvety eyes, she thanked him as if he had performed an act of bravery, for rescuing the little one with such promptitude.

'On the contrary, it was *my* fault that she strayed,' answered the young man, with a twinge of conscience.

And from this time Dorothy, instead of eyeing him strangely, with uncomfortable insinuations about men who were 'naughty,' liked instead to climb on his knee, nestle her head against his shoulder, and prattle her childish secrets into his ear.

Then came a formal invitation from Reuben Sellwood, begging that the young ladies would make any use they liked of his grounds, and more than once Vere, in her visits to the poor in the neighbourhood, was passed by Godfrey on a thorough-bred horse which his father had purchased for him.

'Ah, he is a sly dog,' thought Reuben, in secret satisfaction, 'there was that horse for a long while eating its head off in the stable. And now he has found out that he likes to ride. He knows that he looks well on horseback. It is as if he had arranged everything to make the best impression on her. He did not care a bit about the Torringmoor people, but now he wants to be seen in all his glory.'

For the first time Godfrey had found some one to whom he could talk of the stirring days which he had spent at Oxford, and who could value as he did all those influences which deepen life and broaden culture. But, though he met the cousins occasionally and had a little talk on each occasion, Vere was chary of accepting his father's invitation.

He could not help remembering afterwards how it was, *previous* to Reuben's invitation, that Dorothy had fancied some honeysuckle on the opposite bank. He would never forget the day when the child's convenient fancy had led him to untie the old boat, which had not been used for some time, but was chained to the bank, and had furnished him with an excuse for rowing the cousins until he was obliged to admit,

'We cannot go further; there are so many weeds. My father is right. The lake needs a little clearing. We are already close upon the brushwood.'

As he spoke, he gave a push with his pole —for the oar had somehow disappeared—and there was a fresh scream from Dot, who had curled herself up in the bottom of the boat, and was listening to the rippling of the water.

After this, Vere refused to venture again on the water, and he—too fearful of forgetting himself, and showing his hand betimes, if he over-urged her—contented himself often with lying on the greensward smoking, and

watching the girls at a respectful distance. It is always a critical, if not a dangerous, thing —as persons of a match-making tendency are very well aware—for two young people of opposite sexes to be constantly with each other. For they will either get to hate each other, or to know each other too well.

Now it so turned out that Vere was the first girl with whom Godfrey had ever exchanged partial confidences. She was, likewise, the first girl with whom he had come in contact who could appreciate his dreamy ideas, and be ready to talk a sort of poetry. She was downright, and, on occasions, full of fun, and yet, like himself, she had what may be called the religious tendency to a marked degree, without having any definite opinions about religion. She also had her artistic theories, and therefore was not ready to laugh at his. She differed from other girls with whom he had met, in not calling Wordsworth 'an old stupid,' and being perfectly able to appreciate that new way of looking at the beauties of natural scenery, which was perhaps first in-

augurated by Rousseau, but developed by our insular poets to finer issues.

Had the match-makers left them alone, to get to know each other without that bungling interference which is so often fatal, a feeling of interest, mingled with curiosity, which both these young people began to feel for each other, would have merged, sooner or later, into a more tender sentiment. But Godfrey scarcely knew whether Vere was in jest or earnest, when she said one day, with a new appearance of coldness,

'I do not see how—when your father behaves so strangely as he does to my uncle—it can very well be possible for us to be friends.'

He would have resented the speech from anyone else, but this girl had an odd way of speaking her mind, as if she had been privileged from her cradle. He knew that she thought his father vulgar, and the set of people with whom he associated at Torringmoor underbred; and he was a little vexed with himself for taking it as a testimony to his own superiority, that she could speak freely to himself notwith-

standing such drawbacks. These were days in which Reuben seemed to him a very undesirable father, a most awkward father to have, viewed in connection with the fifth commandment; when he felt as if that father was setting up a barrier between himself and the woman in whom he was interested, by his cruel want of refinement and the freedom of his comments. Poor Reuben, in his radiant eagerness, had no suspicion that he was transgressing beyond the bounds of conventional decorum when he exclaimed one day,

'*I* knew that you would take my lady's fancy.'

'How could you imagine that I should be such a coxcomb as to flatter myself that any girl could fall in love with me?' answered the young fellow, reddening and indignant.

'And why not?' snorted Reuben, like a war-horse scenting the battle. 'She's none so handsome, after all, nor so rich, that she need set herself up.'

'For heaven's sake, don't speak of it any more.'

The determined old man would not be so baulked of his prey, and began smoking the large pipe which held an unusual amount of tobacco.

'The sort of beauty which she has soon passes,' he said, after a pause, remembering that he had the letter by him in which Sir Ralph had promised to do his best to promote his niece's marriage with Reuben's son, and that there was not the slightest reason to anticipate the possibility of Vere declining to carry out the conditions, since, in that case, Sir Ralph would be beggared, and he had implicit confidence in his honour.

'Beauty is but skin-deep,' he continued, meditating aloud. 'Now I used to be told that the girls in Europe were like a lot of dolls, with their heads full of sawdust.'

'And no doubt you had a great curiosity to see those marvels of civilization,' said Godfrey, lightly, thinking it wisest to ignore his father's other allusions.

How could he tell such a man as Reuben that beauty seemed to him only occasional,

never perfect, always fluctuating, but that love continually suggested it in the features of others, and that it need never be wholly absent from our eyes? Would not the old man laugh offensively if he had the faintest idea that his 'boy' looked upon his fellow-creatures less as bodily presences than as spirits clothed with bodies, and that not only did he consider a woman's physical aspect to be a correct index of the spiritual, but that it occurred to him, at times when his father jarred upon him, to think of his own spirit as independent of relationship and accident, and to wish he could be free from the trammels caused by such ties of blood?

He hated these constant allusions to Vere, which ran like a vein through the elder man's conversation. But, though the drops of perspiration began to stand in beads on his forehead, his unruffled features did not betray his agitation as he answered his inquisitor,

'I don't know whether Miss Rashleigh is like a Venus or not. I only know that I have seen a good many women, but never *that* sort of woman before.'

It was a very ambiguous compliment, and not one which Reuben understood. He understood still less when Godfrey said, slowly,

'It is a terrible thing—this lottery of marriage. People talk as if love-making were a passion for boys and girls, beneath the older people, and not worthy of them. If it were so, I would rather have nothing to do with it. I do not know whether I can expect you to follow me when I say that I think a great step like this must affect our moral being to——'

He stopped and cleared his throat. Had he been a woman, he would have said, 'To all eternity.' But just as he had never talked to his father about the stirring days at Oxford, or discussed his friends and college tutors with him, so the deeper matters of existence lay untouched like an abyss between them.

'I—I have a feeling,' he continued, with an effort, 'that the wife I may choose will influence me, not only for all time, but—but—beyond it. I might by chance pitch on a wife with whom my life might be led—in—in such a way as I could wish, but there may be ninety-

nine others with whom it would be a failure. I cannot, of course, say this to the majority of people; they would take me for a humbug, or perhaps a maniac.'

'Maniac' seemed to Reuben to be a mild word, as he literally gasped for breath, and stared in astonishment at his 'poet.' He himself was accustomed to speak of the most sacred topics as he would have spoken of Free Trade, Women's Suffrage, or any other political matter. Nothing, in fact, *was* sacred to him, and he blessed his stars, as he gave another whiff at his pipe, that he at least was free from the endless detail of this complex and worrying civilization, in which folks were so squeamish, and made such odd distinctions for themselves.

'Something to do with the Greek and Latin,' he muttered to himself, with just sufficient light upon the matter to be aware that Godfrey showed more repugnance than enthusiasm to his way of putting things.

'In my days,' he began, in rather a surly tone of voice, 'every Jack had his Jill; but—'

'Ah! that's a joke,' interrupted Godfrey, glad to catch at any straw for refuge. 'I thought you must be joking—it's the best way to joke at such notions. I don't think you would wish me to take the matter too seriously. Really it is too absurd for us to harp on any idea which is so thoroughly exploded as that of compulsory marriage.'

'Why, I thought you yourself saw the sense of the possibility of a match between——'

'The *possibility*, yes, but you can't get people to marry in this country by driving them to it. It is really too ridiculous.'

'And why is it too ridiculous?' thundered Reuben, on his side growing angry.

'Oh, because—don't you see, no people who have any stuff in them—men or women—could think of simulating love—the thing would not only be irksome, it would be disgusting.'

Both men had their blood up. There was something of a likeness between them just then, in spite of the way in which Reuben had disguised his features.

'You use strong language, young man,' said

Reuben, between his set teeth. 'Ah, you are a man of the world because I had ye taught. You know its customs, its false ways, better than I do, for all you are so fastidious and exclusive. *I* know these aristocrats, and I know what will humiliate them. It's not so out-of-the-way, even in this country, for folks who wish to keep an estate together to join families like the houses o' York and Lancaster. You may stand out against me now, but you'll have to give in.'

Godfrey winced. He could not trust himself to answer.

'Look at your hands now,' cried the elder man, stung into fiercer rage by his son's silence, 'they are the white, helpless hands of a girl who never worked for her living. I should like just to ask you who nourished you, who educated you? Who paid your debts, to say nothing of who gave you life? Ah, and after all, you are mortified before *your* world by my ignorance of its ways. And the first thing that I ask you is to be denied—my dearest wish disobeyed—my——'

'Father!'

'Ah, yes, I frighten you, but you think nothing of my wishes. "Do this to please me" has no effect on your fine feelings. But did you ever know me give up what I had set my heart upon? I can tell you it has never yet chanced to me in the course of a longish life to be beaten in anything, and what is more —I never mean to be.'

'One may defy the Fates once too often,' said the younger man, trying to speak lightly, though the veins were swollen like whipcords on his forehead. 'Pray, don't agitate yourself until you know there is something really to cause the agitation.'

It was not true that he was frightened, but that he was humiliated to the dust by this exhibition of blind rage in the man who had given him being. Fortunately, however, it takes two to make a quarrel, and Godfrey—who had no fancy for bandying angry words, which would only embitter feelings and discredit the respectability of the house—rose and slipped away quietly before his father had accomplished

his purpose of extorting from him a promise which might have been easy to give, but difficult to fulfil.

CHAPTER XI.

At Rashleigh Hall a conversation no less awkward had been taking place between uncle and niece.

Vere had been used from her babyhood to all sorts of disagreeable surprises. Her own anxieties ever since she had come to years of discretion had been far-reaching, but she had never thought of blaming her uncle for the uncomfortable state of matters. It was not *his* fault, she reflected, that he had become accustomed to associate his niece with all the meaner devices of household economy which she would gladly have hidden from him. There was no poetry about such poverty, and she could in certain states of feeling sympathise

with him in wishing to ignore it and keep it at arm's length. She was perfectly well aware that his eyes generally rested with pleasure on the pretty little daughter whom she managed to dress artistically; also that he had a myth of his own by which he attributed her own meaner attire and the poverty-stricken appearance of the house partially to her perverseness and love of feminine contradiction. Therefore a secret air of watchful interest with which he had lately begun to look at her was a surprise. She was afraid that it boded ill.

Her fear was not diminished when he said to her one evening,

'What pretty hair you have, my dear! It is a pity that you do not take more pains in dressing it.'

'I have never heard you say so before.'

'It strikes me particularly lately. I have never seen prettier.'

She laughed a little uncomfortably.

Why did he touch her cheek patronizingly as if she were some domestic animal? His hand shook a little as he did so, and she noticed

that it was growing wrinkled. His state of something like premature old age grieved her.

A sudden pallor overspread his features, and his lips were pressed tightly together, as he added,

'You mustn't blame me for making the most of your personal advantages. I am practically a pauper. I am weary of keeping up a poor pretence of being as well-off as my neighbours.'

It was the first time she had heard him speak in this cynical manner about money matters. But after all she was inclined to welcome any stoical resolve by which he could show that he could face inconveniences and the changes of fortune like a man.

So she plucked up courage and answered,

'If all the people about us were once for all disabused of the false idea that the Rashleighs can keep up appearances, it would be easier for everyone. I should say that the sooner we make everyone understand it the better.'

How was it that she could never please

him by her answers? He winced as he said,

'I suppose you would like to see the house shut up, the servants discharged, and the park let out in building lots?'

'Not exactly that. But it seems a pity for you to worry yourself so much about trifles.'

'Trifles,' he said, 'trifles! Would you like to leave the home of your ancestors? Would you like other eyes and other feet to desecrate this place? I am being robbed of all that makes life dear.'

'There are other spots of earth as beautiful,' she ventured, timidly. 'Who can deprive us of the right of property in that which we admire? We *make* it our own as much as if we had paid for it in money.'

He rose and walked about the room, trembling visibly as he did so. Then he faced her and said, abruptly,

'I am being robbed, and you do not care for it. For me to seek a refuge or a shield in *you* is, I ought to know already, worse than useless.'

She was used to these changes of mood in her uncle, and yet there was an anomaly in the somewhat unusual expression of his face which startled her. She had never trusted herself to answer his bitter words. She could not expend on passion or on undutiful rejoinder the strength she had to husband for her hard every-day struggles.

'It is this upstart,—belonging to the riff-raff —who has supplanted me.'

'Oh, I thought that he had helped you,' she said, beneath her breath. She could not venture to acknowledge the thought which was in her mind, and which was somewhat hard to stifle—how it seemed to her that her uncle was jealous like the elder son in the parable, who forgot, in his murmuring, that all which the Father of mankind had was his, and that, however the younger brother might succeed, he could not be robbed of his birthright.

She stood still as if rooted to the ground beneath Sir Ralph's piercing gaze when he added, abruptly,

'This Sellwood is a vulgar upstart, but he has

an unusual son. Tell me what you think of him?'

It was imaged upon her brain, as if by a sudden flicker of light, that the conversation had some sort of connection with Reuben's son, so she said, hesitatingly,

'Why do you ask me?'

'Women's brains are not suited for——' he answered, impatiently, the rest of the sentence being muttered to himself. 'Why do you force me to put the matter baldly? This *chef-d'œuvre* of perfection—Sellwood's son—I have seen him myself—is not only remarkable but exceptional—gifted with extraordinary talents——'

'Well, what does it matter what I think of him? I should think it would be a good thing not to quarrel, to—to——'

'To patch up a kind of reconciliation,' he exclaimed, with his fingers closing convulsively over Reuben's letter. 'You know well enough that you are distressing me. You might guess at my meaning, without obliging me to put it vulgarly. Am I not humiliated enough? These people wish to keep up the old estate—to join

the two families. Such things are sometimes done. Living out of the world, as we do, you could not even hope to marry a younger son in a good family. Our acquaintances of yesterday have flung us aside like old gloves to-day. That is the way in society, when you have not a shilling to count upon. But here are people ready to worship the very ground you tread on. Young Sellwood will make a capital husband. These are times of transition, when even old families do not inquire very much into anyone's forbears. These people are up to their necks in gold. I have long made up my mind that it will be better for you to marry a——'

He had been speaking rapidly, and pacing about as if he were a caged animal, but he had ceased to look her in the face.

She had recovered her voice by this time. The new surprise had shaken her a little, but hers was the dominant nature, and she had generally had the best of it hitherto in any encounter of wits.

'Ah, that's your idea about marriage,' she said, in her firmest tones. 'Mine differs from

it completely, and I think my mother's would, if she had lived. Let us talk of something else.'

'You have no enjoyment in your life. You are ground down by this miserable poverty—you have seen nothing of life.'

'Pray, don't pity me. I like my life as it is. A life all of dressing and gaiety, with afternoon teas squeezed in between balls and concerts, operas and lawn-tennis parties—hurrying here and there. I can't bear even the thought of it.'

'You don't mean to say——'

'I am quite content. I don't want a husband—I——'

A complexity of instincts checked her speech.

'It really seems so funny,' she said, and then laughed uncontrollably, till the tears came into her eyes.

It seemed to help her to keep the indignation from being concentrated in her voice. For she had made a rapid induction, and reproached herself already with a conclusion to her speech, which had not been quite artless.

Then, dropping her voice, she added,

'You must give me time to think a little. It is so easy to be misguided, when one wishes to please kind relations, and to do a thing which is wrong—terribly wrong in itself—from, apparently, a right motive.'

'If so, a merciful Judge would not lay it to your door,' the voice within her seemed to answer, as she stood pressing her hands to her eyes, in a very different attitude from the compliant one in which her uncle had supposed all young girls would let their womanly impulses sway them. 'This—this man must have some hold on my poor uncle—some claim—which he has promised to forego—on a consideration—and that consideration——' She could get no further.

She moved her hands from her eyes, and looked down at the faded Turkey carpet—full, in spite of its shabbiness, of subtle gradations of colour—and fancied she remembered to have read somewhere that there used to be a law which allowed debtors in old, benighted times to offer the hands of their daughters, and even

of their wives, to their creditors, and that the creditors accepted these women in lieu of their debt, if they were sufficiently pleasing.

'I wonder if the Archæological Society could fix the date of the last time a woman was sold in England?' she said to herself, with a pain which rankled in her heart. Then aloud, and with a sort of scorn which she could no longer attempt to veil, she added,

'Some one says that there is no such happy life for a woman as that spent in suffering for those she loves—that a woman can transform self-denial into pleasure—that such suffering ought to be a great angel to her. But it depends on what sort. If, for instance, I were to marry a man whom I could not tell that I could like, and afterwards see many others who were superior to him; if I were to please you by joining two families without even the pretence that I was chosen for myself, and that I was one of a special pair of people predestined for each other—what becomes of the "marriages-made-in-heaven" theory, and all the rest of those ideas?'

'You take away my breath,' cried Sir Ralph,

impatiently. 'Why express yourself so coarsely?'

'I am simply thinking out the problem of how to do my duty to you, and yet not to stain my own conscience,' she answered, with a pathos that grew piteous in the eyes which could sometimes be full of fun and sometimes of pathetic entreaty. 'I—I don't quite understand, and I should like to ask just one other question. If this appeal comes to you from young Mr. Sellwood, why did he not address me in the proper way? In matters of this kind it is not usual to refer to such business-like arrangements at all.'

The question took him aback. He was not prepared for it, and, after reflecting a minute, parried it by another.

'You do not find him so disagreeable then, and if——'

Now it was *her* turn to shrink from the gaze of the questioner. She had never prevaricated, and did not mean to begin now, however hard she might be driven.

'There is no occasion to talk of "ifs" at all,' she answered, trying to be conscientious, though

evasive. 'But it seems to me that Mr. Sellwood can speak for himself, and it will be time enough to consider the subject when he *does* speak.'

'He *must* like you—he will feel himself honoured—he will never dream of thwarting his father's purpose.'

'Can *I* not have my purpose too?' she said, drawing herself up—and looking, as her uncle afterwards said, as if she were Sappho and Hypatia rolled into one—'one cannot live with one's eyes shut, and of course I cannot help seeing how terribly people suffer when they make unhappy marriages.'

On the lips of a person advanced in life such a statement might be tolerated, but from a girl it seemed to him to savour of worldly wisdom and almost of arrogance.

'You are young to be already acquainted with the miseries of life,' and the bitterness of his tone touched her.

'I have need to be acquainted with it when you talk of me as if I were a bale of cotton,' she cried, indignantly, suddenly forgetting her dignity.

'The day is stormy—there is a good deal of electricity in the air, and you have a nervous attack,' he answered, pleased with his diplomatic talent, 'girls of twenty should have no nerves.'

'Uncle,' she said, beseechingly, and laid her head against his shoulder, 'you will promise me not to speak of this again.'

'I will promise you not to urge you or to force you to anything. We will do nothing prematurely,' he replied, still confident in his own diplomacy, and not thinking it necessary to excuse or explain away any act of his own.

CHAPTER XII.

Sir Ralph was too much occupied with his own anxieties to notice his niece's heavy eyelids, and tightly-drawn lips as she appeared at the breakfast-table on the following morning.

She escaped as soon as she could into the wilderness in which lately she had seen a thousand minute beauties which even Godfrey would not have noticed. But she did not see them now as she hurried along, hoping that rapidity of motion would help her to calm her thoughts.

'Was it possible,' she went on crying to herself, 'possible that they should even *dream* of a bargain so degrading?'

Shame had prevented her from speaking out

as she would liked to have done. She had done little more than pull the check-string, but now delay would give her time to regulate matters in her own way. Her usual honest way of looking at things had come to her assistance, and with it a reaction of feeling which was certainly hard upon an innocent man. She would have liked to have been able to say with truth that her inmost feelings were against the match, even if Godfrey had been desperately set on it. But a belief that a trap had been laid with his connivance made her wild with indignation.

On the previous evening her uncle had spoken of thunder in the sultry atmosphere. For a morning early in July, there was an unusual feeling of languor—a heat as of burning summer in the air. In the garden of Broadmeads, which was all ablaze with flowers, there was here and there a drone-bee, but even the butterflies which ventured out of their hiding-places seemed to swim languidly in the sultry atmosphere. Far away on the moor—glimpses of which could be seen through the

branches of the trees—the heather was already being fired to crimson by the unusual force of the sun, and in the early morning a sort of luminous mist hovered over the river. Here, even in the wilderness, there was a perceptible weight in the air, a rippling of the water which made one sleepy, and a lazy droop of the leaves.

Godfrey, who was peculiarly susceptible to all atmospheric influences, and to whom that languid ripple of the stream had all the force of a narcotic, roused himself at the sound of a footstep from a dreamy trance which was overtaking him in the midst of what he considered to be a most unsatisfactory sketch. It was with a feeling of self-mockery at his own weakness and want of decision in a difficult crisis that he also had sought the 'wilderness,' knowing perfectly well that, since his father had invited Miss Rashleigh to make free use of this portion of the property which originally belonged to her ancestors, it had become her favourite haunt in hot weather.

He raised his hat as he saw her in the dis-

tance, but she gave him a stiff, sweeping bow, and was passing him a few minutes afterwards with a strange, fleeting glance, her eyes resting on him for a moment, as if she had not thought it worth while to go out of her path, but was scarcely aware of his presence. At that moment the sun fell on her through an opening between the branches, and he saw more plainly than he had ever seen before a want of regularity of feature which in general was not noticeable. Her usual lovely colouring seemed to have deserted her, and her face looked severe in a sort of Holbein shadowlessness. It was as if a different coloured light had been turned on her since he saw her last. *She* was not changed, but the medium was.

'Ah! I might have known it,' he muttered to himself, turning pale, in spite of a strong effort to conceal his annoyance. 'I might have known it. Some horrible gossip has possibly reached her, and the disgust which she would naturally feel would be sure to set her against me.'

Had there not been a natural recoil of his

own heart at the first sight of her in the distance—a recoil which, in the case of the woman, would be a hundred times intensified? Shame on those who had caused it!

He hesitated no longer, but, jumping up with a ready joke, laughed,

'I am spoiling paper as usual.'

She felt frightened and shaken when he addressed her, for she likewise had felt it impossible to decide exactly what should be her line of action. Her heart swerved from its regular beat, and she felt herself growing red and tremulous as she answered,

'If *I* could afford to buy splendid pictures, I should feel it lost labour to be always painting them.'

It was less the words than the tone in which she uttered them that had to his ears a condemnatory sound. Could it be the same voice, the cadence of which he had first of all admired for its bird-like tones?

'Ah! that is the bother of having money,' he answered, eagerly. 'Don't remind me of it; one loses the spur to action.'

Perhaps the reply was unexpected. She acknowledged it with a regal inclination of her head, trying to appear as indifferent as before, but being unable to prevent a sharp flash out of that pair of dark-blue eyes which had never looked at him with disapprobation before. Possibly the young fellow would rather have seen that sign of her ill-favour than no intimation at all that she was aware of his presence. As it was, he continued, in low-voiced, mock melancholy,

'Don't you see that if I were to purchase yards of pictures—as many as they have in the Crystal Palace—I should learn more by coming to Nature as a meek student myself. I have made such a mess of lots of things that it comforts me to recollect that the most dismal failures are, after all, sometimes the path to success.'

'*Sometimes*,' she repeated, a little ironically.

'We'll say that a turned lesson is a condition of most people's knowledge, a path retraced sometimes leads to a better thing—it's all a lottery about success.'

'"'Tis not in Nature to command success,
But we'll do more, Horatio, we'll deserve it,"

—she quoted, with a facetious toss of her head, but still with the air of a young woman who speaks little to a stranger.

It was surprising what an honest intention each had of being disagreeable to the other. He could not help remembering, with a slight amount of sarcasm, how—a day or two before she had told him, more by hints than in a direct manner, some of the little experiences of her life, and how eagerly he had listened to the unconscious revelation. Now he himself had a sense of talking to her as if over a fence.

'I don't know about *deserving* it,' he answered, a little sadly. Some men are more conscious of failure than others. They start with such fine ideals and turn heart-sick when they are none of them realised. Don't you hope sometimes that through pain crooked things may be made straight?'

She was intending to resent his way of talking to her as if he should dare to lay claim to a certain proprietorship—a sort of understood

arrangement between himself and her uncle, in which he might venture to take it all for granted. And, to her surprise, he was only asking a deferential question.

'I forgot,' he said, 'you are too young to have gone through any such tedious process.'

'It is exceedingly kind of you,' she replied, with a suspicion of laughter in her eyes, 'to make me out to be young when there is not so much to choose between our ages.'

She was more like her usual self with that look of natural fun just dawning in her face, and he drew a sigh of relief as he answered,

'I meant to be most tremendously civil. It seemed to me there was some new sort of ritual to be observed this morning. I never studied formalities, but possibly amongst the numerous books which are published there may be one to regulate etiquette between neighbours who meet in each other's grounds.'

'It is *your* park—it is good of you to let me use it.'

It was a momentary tribute to fairness which any honest Englishwoman might wish to render,

and at the moment it occurred to her that he *had* been exceedingly polite, and that it might be a prudent thing for her to become such good friends with him that her uncle might see any other arrangement to be impossible. While he was saying to himself,

'She calls me good. Good, forsooth! What would she say if she knew how my father has positively insulted her by his ready-made schemes.'

Aloud he answered,

'It is straining a point to call it mine. It belonged to your ancestors.'

She made a gesture of impatience.

'At any rate, your presence graces it. I never have been able to forget the first day when I had the happiness of meeting you in it.'

She shrugged her shoulders more impatiently still. Indignant as she was at the idea that love could be a bargain in which souls were to be bartered—instead of being a blessing and a mystery, a lightener of human woes, a helper of human sympathy—it seemed to her as if his

last sentence had not been invented on the impulse of the moment, but had been drawn out of a store of ready-made compliments.

There was a pause. She looked at him with a proud, hurt look, and then she said,

'Oh, this is too much! It is all very well if you are in fun, paying compliments to my birth and that sort of thing. But why do you find out this exactly this morning.'

'Find out what?'

But a few moments before he had made the plunge with a sense of elation rather than despair. And now she looked at him with an incredulous and disdainful air, contracting herself into as small a compass as possible, as if she could not bear to stand near to him on the same path.

'Why—that—the place—is graced by my presence, and that—that—you will never forget, and all that nonsense. Why do you say what you do not mean?'

'I know I made a clumsy attempt to express my feelings. You may meet some one else another day who will be more fluent.'

'A few days ago I might have believed you —but *now*'—with a flush of indignation, and a look of cold dismissal in her eyes—'I know more about it than I did yesterday.'

'How so?'

There was a gruff emphasis in his voice, as unmusical as the forced tone which he had blamed in hers. He was generally so calm and almost languid in his manner, that there was something constrained even in his excitement.

'You know,' was all she would deign to say.

'I beg you to explain yourself.'

'To what purpose?' she asked, drily. 'Oh, I don't like all this sort of sophistication any more than you do yourself—I can't endure it. I don't want mere glib phrases—compliments to which I have never been used. But, if I were to speak out, you would not like it. There are more urgent matters for you to attend to than listening to my explanations. The cries of the poor—who are ground down on this estate—might reach your ears, and,

if you are so rich, you might help *them*. The reputed landowner is my uncle, the rightful one is your father. My uncle is powerless to help the suffering which he is condemned to witness. He is tied hand and foot, and not allowed to interfere. My ancestors could do little enough to alleviate the growing misery, but, at any rate, they were not grasping landlords, unfairly trying to raise the rental of the land—not almost more cruel than slave-owners, in considering their own profits to such an extent as to drive the old families off the estate. They ask mercy of your father, and he has absolutely refused. He rules with a rod of iron—in *your* interests, as I am told.'

CHAPTER XIII.

BEFORE he could draw his breath to answer her, she was gone. The sudden passion had dismayed herself almost as much as Godfrey. She had been brooding on these things for weeks, and now the fire which her musing had kindled had suddenly flamed up, though she had thought it well covered in. She had delivered herself of her sentiments with curiously mixed feelings of guiltiness, and yet of having done her duty. She told herself that she had been right to stop a pretence at unreal devotion which was derogatory to her, and that she would continue to stop it in the future, whatever it might cost. Her natural protector, her uncle, had placed her in a false position. She was

purposeless and defenceless, and had wildly attempted to turn the man's thoughts in a contrary direction. Her knowledge of his disposition had helped her to guess that the sarcasm with which she left him would tell upon him more or less.

'It can't be the case,' he said to himself. 'My father is a partially uneducated man, like all men who have had to make their own way in life; but the very fact that he has risen would prevent him from acting like a brute.'

At the same moment the thought occurred to him that Miss Rashleigh would not have made the insinuation had it not contained at least a modicum of truth, and that it was just possible that men like his father might be tempted to despise and tread down those from whom they had risen, looking upon society—as some savages do—as a struggle for the survival of the strongest.

'It will be easy for me to test the thing myself,' he muttered—feeling for the moment no longer like a love-sick swain, but like a man who had talked, in high-sounding words, grand-

ly about ideals, and had been caught by a girl in a dereliction of duty, which was fatuous as well as arrant. For, if his father had been making a mistake about his mode of dealing with his poorer neighbours, surely a word or a hint would be sufficient to pull him up, and it was the part of the son to give such a hint.

'And I never took the trouble to inquire, though all the money is to come to me,' thought Godfrey to himself, as a hot wave of colour rose to his cheek when he remembered that, in the case of the boy who had been blamed for gathering flowers, he had been told that the child's father was an ordinary farm-labourer, who, for the support of himself and a wife and eight children, received about ten shillings a week.

'I am shamed by a girl. No doubt she thinks I must be a selfish scoundrel not to inquire if there are others in such a plight, and not to see that such pay must be thoroughly inadequate for the support of human beings,' he reflected.

A couple of hours before, Godfrey had been speculating—as it was his habit to speculate about all sorts of things—as to whether it would be better to have one's own happiness spread out in a mild way, like gold beaten into a leaf, over a series of years, or to enjoy the very essence of it in one period like a big nugget. But now the thought which principally occupied his impressionable mind was no longer whether he should be able to say, 'I have had my golden time of this blessing of life. I have fulfilled some ambition, or I have known the truest sympathy in the love of some faithful heart.' It was, 'Would the happiness be worth calling by that name if it were at the expense of the misery of others? Shall I add one more to the lackadaisical wretches who are whining, as Carlyle says, to be "hap-happy"?'

The day was still hot and heavy when he set out for an unusual walk of investigation among the cottages of the labourers and the smaller farms. Bees were still burying themselves in the hearts of flowers and sucking the golden

nectar, whilst grasshoppers like tiny acrobats leaped on the blades of grass. In the wilderness a blind worm—innocuous and beautiful—was stretching his snaky length close to the box of paints and unfinished water-colour sketch, which Godfrey had forgotten. He was hurrying from cottage to cottage to detect if possible some weak point in what had seemed to him almost a cruel accusation of his father.

What did he find? My reader, I am not going to weary you with descriptions which might fill a book instead of a chapter. The wages of labourers in that district varied from eight to nine shillings a week, and there was scarcely any space for kitchen garden allotted with the cottages of the tenants.

Sir Ralph Rashleigh's agent, when he could afford to keep an agent, had always attempted to rectify the poverty-stricken condition of the estate by increasing the size of the large farms on it, and by throwing into them the plots of ground which had previously been

used as kitchen or potato gardens for the peasantry.

By degrees, as we know, these farms had been mortgaged and had passed into the hands of the owner of Broadmeads. Sir Ralph had long since ceased to keep an agent, but Reuben Sellwood employed no less than two, who in the opinion of his son deserved to be compared with jackal purveyors to the hungry needs of the king lion.

'Why, when my father has so much already, should he be continually hankering after more?' thought the young fellow, as he plodded home that evening, fagged and sorely perplexed, a sadder and a wiser man, but with no solution to the riddle.

He had come to the conclusion that the want most severely felt in the neighbourhood was more cottages. Those which he had seen were badly built and badly drained—built on the mud and with rubbish scarcely better than mud for their rickety walls. The overcrowding was horrible, and yet, as one of the agents had suggested, there was nothing to prevent Reuben

Sellwood from building on some of those thousands of acres of moor or common, which Reuben had bought up by degrees. A small portion of which would have served as an admirable site for cottages. Godfrey had seen meagre-looking, ill-fed children who could not be fed upon milk, because milk in the larger farms was reserved for cream and cheese, the greater part of the butter-milk being given to the pigs.

What was to be done? Godfrey had been occupied in teaching some of the choir boys to sing, and had never informed himself as to the rags which they wore under the surplices so pleasing to look at on Sundays. He had been so far from intending to neglect his duties as a future landlord that he was full of new plans about agriculture, and had intended to open a working men's club in which it might be possible to give the working-man some philosophic insight into the mysteries of the universe.

But—dreamer though he had been—he was compelled to admit that at present he had nothing

to do with theories; he had to keep to realities. Civilization itself, if such realities are allowed to continue, would soon become impossible. On passing through one of the village slums, Godfrey's attention had been attracted by the dirty face of one of the lads, who looked very different in his surplice on a Sunday, and who formed one of a small crowd of little children collected round a narrow doorway. He had always fancied that this lad was sickly, and his conscience smote him as, stooping under a doorway, he passed into the interior of the cottage, and was invited to seat himself on the old arm-chair, which served the 'gudeman,' and was apparently the only article worthy the name of a chair that stood on the broken stones of the floor. Boxes and three-legged stools seemed to suffice for the accommodation of the other members of a large family. And on a miserable pallet a dying woman lay groaning, with no one to minister to her wants, or alleviate her suffering. Godfrey, forcing himself to conquer his distaste to the surroundings, sat down beside her, trying with his own hands to

raise her head, while he posted an urchin in one direction after the doctor, and another to the village shop to purchase nourishment.

Alas! it was but one case among many, and this dreamer—who had pictured peasant-life to himself as a romantic and interesting thing—heard for the first time the details of a modern wretchedness and degradation, in which it seemed to him that the progress of a thousand years had done little to raise the condition of the labourer either mentally or physically. His heart waxed hot within him, and he could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses. Not one of the members of this household ever tasted animal food except as a rare indulgence, and the wife had been compelled to supply the place of the too luxurious bakers' bread by her own rough baking of a coarser meal.

It took a good deal to rouse Godfrey into indignant action, but he forgot his own mortifications as he made his way late in the evening through the slush of unmended roads, and passed another cottage where some sick creatures were

huddled together over the embers of a miserable fire. It made him irritable to see the afflictions of the people. There might be improvidence or other hostile circumstances which accounted for such a state of penury. But, if it were so, they must be taught better. He was shocked at what he had seen, and determined forthwith to remonstrate with his father.

Where should he seek him? Not in the room which he had hitherto been told was to be kept for 'business purposes,' and from which Godfrey began to shrink with a new horror of the deeds of cruelty which for the first time he imagined had emanated from it. There had been a sort of understanding between the father and the son that the latter should have nothing to do with 'business.'

This room had been built out from the main building, so that the villagers could have access to it through a back door opening on the common. Reuben, who was careful to separate anything that savoured of work from the atmosphere of his new and luxurious home, had spent no money on the adornment of this apartment.

It might have been a room in the backwoods from its appearance, so bare and unfurnished was it. At a large deal table, on which stood a plain desk and a large glass inkstand, the agent on certain days was seated—those were the days on which the cottagers, whose rents were not forthcoming, were summoned before him and threatened with eviction, and when Mr. Newton, having received directions from his master, spoke to them in a harsh, rasping voice, and refused to hear the complaints of those who said that the soil was meagre, and that only the barest subsistence could be wrung from it. Mr. Newton himself owned a house with four bare matter-of-fact walls and plate glass windows a little outside the grounds, and preserved his dignity as an official by having a separate entrance up a staircase, which had been made for the purpose, to this chamber of horrors.

The very aspect of the place was distasteful to Godfrey. He hated it as much as he hated the agent's house. To his excited fancy, it seemed as if there was a sinister contrast between the velvet arm-chair in which one man, with his

eyebrows drawn together and a harsh expression of face, was accustomed to sit in state, and the cane-bottomed chairs, ranged in a corner opposite, on which others were used to await their doom. He had had an interview with Mr. Newton, the agent, in the so-called 'business' room, and the information gained during that interview was certainly not reassuring.

Newton was low-browed, with small, penetrating eyes. He himself had to toil like a mill-horse through the weary months of the year, and found it so hard to ensure a day's holiday for himself or his wife and children, that he could not be expected to have much sympathy for the people who lived in a state of squalor, and were exposed to a few more physical hardships. For him, as for the labourers with whom he had to deal, there was little prospect of rest on this side the grave. Each had to drive the bargain which was best for himself. Each was a sad specimen of the hopelessness of the lot of the ordinary working man, the few alleviations which were to be allowed to him in reward for his thrift. Newton was perhaps,

after all, the most to be pitied, as all the 'dirty work' fell to his share. And, as he repeated a few of his experiences, it seemed to Godfrey as if the very atmosphere of the room was impregnated with hopeless heart-burnings, useless strivings, and tales of despair. The pendulum of the large clock which stood on the mantelpiece seemed to echo the refrain of one of Longfellow's rather hackneyed, but very popular poems, 'For ever, never—never, for ever!'

Was it true, he asked himself with some revulsion of feeling, that his father showed the worst side of his nature in his treatment of the people from whom he had risen?—true that Reuben, who must know the misery of such a state of things himself, could be content for these people to lead swinish, miserable, disconsolate lives, while he and his were to fare luxuriously, and be clothed in purple and fine linen?

'I have something to say to you—something rather important. Can you give me five minutes?' he asked his father, a few days afterwards, when he met Reuben strolling in

the grounds of Broadmeads. 'Just a few minutes' conversation?'

'Half an hour or more, if you like it, my lad,' answered the elder man, somewhat pleased at the new sign of cordiality on the part of the younger.

He did not notice that Godfrey was pale with mysterious fears, and that there was a heavy-hearted look about him as he tried to assume his usual manner, stopping every now and then to call attention to some new beauty in the wilder part of the park. Unconsciously his footsteps always strayed to the older part of the property, and he felt as if it would be easier for him to speak on a painful subject in this sheltered nook, with the sun gleaming through the interstices of waving boughs of trees, and with fern-like moss beneath his feet, than it would have been in the fuller light and more invigorating air which blew keenly on the open moors, whispering to him of hope and aspiration, and of all that was ideal within his own mind.

Something in the expression of his face, and

the evident difficulty which he had in opening up the conversation, led Reuben to ask,

'What has gone wrong with ye? Could ye not tell me as well when we meet at dinner?'

'Hardly, before the footmen, who are always standing about and staring at us,' answered Godfrey, with his impulsiveness already somewhat dashed by the sight of the hard and impenetrable face. 'I want to talk to you about some of these poor wretches who seem to have such a difficulty in keeping the wolf of something like famine from their doors. They are hungry, and want food. If we do nothing to help them, it seems to me they will be bound to do something to help themselves.'

'Humph,' said Reuben, surveying his son with a long stare of bewilderment. 'Who's been a-fooling you with this owerdrawn picture? Tak' my advice. It's evident you've not been brought up to business. Would it not be better for you to keep to your paint-box, and yer fiddle, and——'

'My other toys,' hotly responded the young fellow. 'No, I think that I have been wrong

to allow myself to be lumped with that half of the world, which is so indifferent to the struggles of the other half. I am not a child to be content with toys.'

'Ah—h,' said Reuben, giving him another stare. It was an effective and deeply guttural interjection, which seemed to Godfrey to imply, 'Are you sure of that?'

To do the father justice, he was sorry directly he had uttered it. He had not intended to betray the cynicism which he generally controlled in the presence of his son. But Godfrey was easily moved. He hated everything which approached a scene. And the perspiration stood on his forehead as he awoke to the thought of how difficult it would be to keep his temper, now that the moment had arrived when he would be forced to put questions to his father, and expect to have them answered. It was not only that from his childhood he had stood in something like awe of this iron man—obeying him to avoid discussion, and hedged-in by an authority which he had occasionally hated—but he began to wonder how he ever could have been so

carried away by his emotions as to be sanguine enough to imagine he could accomplish any purpose by demanding an account of his father.

'Perhaps you think it weak-minded of me to be shocked and horrified—in an age when we have heard so much of material advancement and the strides of civilisation—to find human beings living on our own estate much as they might have lived in—in—the days of Noah.'

It was rather an anti-climax to a speech which he had commenced a little grandly, and it did not improve matters that Reuben laughed.

But Godfrey had avowedly a horror of rhetoric, and continued, more quietly,

'I mean that there is no sign whatever of progress—the commonest drainage and tillage —the merest creature-comforts are wanting.'

'Well, and whose fault is it?' answered Reuben, gruffly. 'If they are content to live in the mud, let 'em live in it, but let 'em remember that they have to thank the Rashleighs for it. *Who* ground 'em down in the mud, I should like to know?'

He stopped short at the brink of his own conclusion as he asked the question. It passed through his mind with a grim sense of humour that he ought to know much more about the inequalities of human existence—with life at one extreme and life at another practically two different things—than this young fellow who had been so delicately reared. No one needed less than Reuben to have the painful features of that struggle for existence exaggerated. He knew little of science, and would have been a good deal surprised if the 'evolutionists' had told him that the same struggle went on with fearful acuteness in the air, the water, the woods, and even the grass. But he perfectly comprehended that amongst human beings that process which is described as the 'survival of the fittest,' and which had brought himself uppermost, must relegate others to comfortless homes and lower conditions of life. He was not good at speaking, and could not help being aware that the deduction would not be so clear to his son's mind as it was to his own, that the people in the neighbourhood were suffering from the

tyranny of successive generations of Rashleighs. He despised them for having so long submitted to the old *régime,* which imposed inequalities of a certain kind between man and man, but at the same time he saw no occasion to bother himself about the vast gulf which must inevitably exist between poverty and wealth. It was fair that the man, who, by dint of his own energy and labour, had struggled out of the mud, should exact his due from the tadpoles who remained in it, and who had made no effort to help themselves.

Godfrey did not answer. How could he tell his father that he not only sympathised with the suffering creatures, but was an ardent propagandist of new opinions against which the old traditions, that had been thought absolute, would have to be defended. English or Irish people had never as yet dreamt of finding out the use of dynamite or petroleum, but it had dawned upon the minds of a few of the more advanced Radicals that wealth, such as that which Reuben had accumulated, and which he looked upon as a means of enjoyment for his

descendants, might in due time have to be shared more or less by the people.

'Well, my time is important,' said the older man, after a pause. 'When ye've done dreamin', I'm ready to listen. I suppose this is what comes of all the Latin and Greek. Never mind. I deny ye nothink. Have you been gettin' into debt? Are yer pockets full enough?'

The allusion was unfortunate. The fact that luxury, diverted to the production of superfluities, was depriving the people of necessaries—was hanging like a millstone of ignominy round the young man's neck. He hated to be lapped in swan's-down, and fed, as he thought, on sugarplums, whilst others were toiling and ground down. The thought seemed to choke him, and make it difficult for him to find his power of articulation.

'My allowance is too large,' he answered, a little sharply. 'Make it a quarter of what it is, and build the labourers better cottages.'

The sound of Reuben's long, low whistle was not calculated to allay the young man's growing irritation, nor the increasing feeling that

he wanted to get the yoke of this wealth from his neck, and dash it, if need be, in somebody's face.

'What exaggerated nonsense you young chaps git into your heads,' answered the father, a little roughly. 'I tell ye, if the soil *is* bad, it's their dooty to make it better. But you speak of what you don't know. How can you —as a stranger—be acquainted with the facts?'

'It seems to me, it becomes my duty to acquaint myself with the facts, if—if this property is at any time to come to me.'

Reuben laughed bitterly.

'I've told you that *I* am not responsible for the state of the cottages. Let the curse light on them as built them. Meanwhile, if ye want to impress me wi' the elevation o' yer character —go, like the French princess, and feed folks with buns.'

'Out of my allowance? It is not charity they want, though some of them are starving, and one at least down with fever.'

'Humbug!' retorted Reuben, with some attempt at a sneer, though he had not the faintest

appreciation of what his son was driving at. 'Why will you put your oar into affairs which don't concern ye?'

Godfrey thought again; this time in a state of despair.

Was there any means by which he could make his very different theories intelligible to his father? Things which were hackneyed platitudes to him, would be incomprehensible paradoxes to the more untaught mind of Reuben. At last he said, speaking slowly,

'You were just now saying about these unfortunate creatures, why couldn't they be content to live like their forefathers, in what you called the mud? Their forefathers, for instance, were accustomed to empty pails of water into the gutters, and to let the cocks and hens strut into their houses; and their lives were supposed to be undisturbed pastorals. These people are a good deal like them, except for the pastoral part of it—their lives seem to be more like tragedies. I hate to see men who are pinched and broken down, and who look as if they are systematically underfed till they

have no strength to stand together; and help each other against the tyranny of—of the upper classes.'

He stopped. The hatching of any sort of eggs is supposed to require some genial warmth. There should be an atmosphere of some sort of sympathy, instead of freezing indifference in the hearer. The cold expression of Reuben's face seemed to say, 'Don't meddle with me. There is so much that is visionary and unpractical about you young fellows, that it is only a waste of time to listen to all your nonsense.'

He was much tempted to say, aloud, 'Fiddle-de-dee!' but mastered himself by an effort, only betraying his increasing vexation by the twitching of his hands, and the restless crossing and recrossing of his legs.

Godfrey continued, now a little hesitatingly,

'There are hundreds of acres of untilled land, as I understand, belonging to your estate. Why should we suffer from the effects of a large population congested on a small area of ground?'

Then spake out Reuben,

'The cottages will do well enough. I belong to the common ruck of matter-of-fact men, and I don't understand new-fangled ideas. As I told ye before, they are out o' your beat. If you're a wise chap, you'll stick to your own concerns.'

Sheer desperation forced the lad to speak out more plainly.

'My facts are true enough. At least you can allow me to acquaint myself with the details of what it seems is some day to be my own calling. *I* can't deal with men as if I were not responsible for my dealings—and you—if—if—*your* good name is spoken against, don't you suppose that I suffer?' he asked, turning a little paler and unconsciously dropping his voice.

Then for the first time the passion and feeling as well as the latent coarseness, which were ordinarily concealed beneath the marble coldness of Reuben's demeanour, burst forth, making him dash his hand heavily on the table.

'My good name be d—d,' he cried, to his son's astonishment. 'Do you think I should

care one jot if all the devils in hell were to speak against me? Go and paint your flowers and play your fiddle. *I* make the money, and it is you who spend it.'

'I wish you did not make it. We should have been happier without it.'

'You think so?' he said, ironically.

'Yes, money is not everything.'

'Then perhaps you would rather I did not make you my heir?'

Godfrey had anticipated the question, and already his active mind had been planning schemes of domestic economy, and thinking how delightful it would be to combine 'plain living and high thinking,' and to manage artistically on a moderate income. He had always hated his father's lavish and ostentatious expenditure and had been secretly exasperated by unnecessary display. But now he began quite to pity the people who were rich and who could have no opportunity of practising economies.

'Money is not everything,' he tried to explain, forgetting for the moment the feeling of constraint which had prevented him from ex-

pounding his schemes to one who would not understand them. 'But in this case it will enable us to take down those cranky, tumble-down cottages and build new ones on better sanitary principles. I have no wish to demoralise the people or to loosen the bonds of society—it is no part of my programme to move too fast, but to encourage better relations between landlords and tenants, and not to give our neighbours stones when they have a right to ask for bread. Let us teach them to help themselves. Why shouldn't there be associations of manual labourers—co-operation, if you like to call it so—don't *we* have co-operation? Why shouldn't they have higher wages, and better articles for the small amount of money doled out as wages?'

Once launched on his pet ideas, he had almost forgotten his usual reticence of speech till he was roused by a stentorian voice, which made him instinctively put his hands to his ears and long to remind his father that it was not necessary for him to exert a voice of apparently unlimited power.

'What kind of man do you take me for?' cried Reuben, rising from his chair as if he found the conversation unsupportable, and beginning with hurried steps to parade the room. 'I don't want you to be one of those dutiful, obedient sons who say "Amen" to all that their fathers want, but I expect ye to understand that these sort o' matters need a lot of experience—it takes a lifetime to git it. Any fool ought to know that money is a force, a force given to the fellow who sweats to git it. S'pose by pains and a lot o' hard grinding work one o' us has climbed atop o' the tree, ain't he a right to hev' his wages for what he hev' done? Ain't it a good thing for such as him that there are a precious lot of idiots in the world who will never do the thing he has done? Every capitalist will tell ye as business is business. Sentiment may do for such as you. I don't say as it mayn't be right in its way. But clap it into a separate compartment and keep it there.'

Godfrey was silent again. His eyes were being opened by degrees. Reuben—in desiring to assert himself, and to force his boy back

again into that tacit submission which had been his normal state—was unconscious of the sting which lay hidden in his words. Was not every man naturally a labouring animal, and was it fitting that the son should be so entirely dependent on the father? Godfrey, whose sensibilities were so easily made to smart, and who had not felt the gall before, was beginning to chafe under it.

The new sensation was the more intolerable because Reuben, in the loss of his good-humour, had not been able to keep up the thin veneer of social polish—for the aping of which a good deal of reserve had been necessary—but appeared for the first time in a new phase of bullying coarseness.

'Well,' he said, looking discontentedly at his son's troubled face, 'we are coming to the end of our half hour. It's a precious long five minutes. You've had your say, and done wi' it. You may be clever enough, but your training don't fit ye for threshing out these sort o' questions. You don't know the world, and, natural like, ye don't allow for the whinings of the

foxes who've got to put up with the green grapes. How preciously happy ye ought to be, with everything as you can think of provided for ye. *I* have never felt like that. I've got to wonder what it feels like.'

'Ah! there's the pity of it,' said Godfrey, beneath his breath. 'How much better it would have been if I had been allowed to toil for myself!'

For the first time in his life he felt a sort of indignity in the fact that he had been devoted, as it were, to ceremonial purposes.

'Why did he give me a first-class education if his only object was to boast of it, and to make me feel the pinch of it in not being able to betake myself to any of the pursuits which are supposed to be incompatible with the elegant repose of a university man?' he thought to himself.

'It is altogether a false position,' he said, aloud, as he listened in a sort of stupor to Reuben's surly words.

The room had seemed to grow darker as, one by one, his illusions had been demolished by

the pitiless blows of this ill-mannered Iconoclast. A feeling of disgust—almost of repulsion—seemed to be clutching like a hand at Godfrey's throat, and rendering it impossible for him to make any further efforts to modify the opinions which probably nothing would ever alter.

'Humph! I've astonished ye,' said Reuben, seating himself in his arm-chair, and indulging in a chuckle. 'You've been too long like that fine Greek lady, shut up in a tower. If you'd had to work as I have, you would have known all the ins-and-outs of business long before this.'

Godfrey put up his hand with a movement which was instinctive. He had no idea of opening his heart just then to his father, but the latter saw that he had gone too far.

'Well, never mind—it was not your fault if you were born with the tastes of the haristocracy.' (Reuben very rarely aspirated his vowels, and the slip at which his son winced was caused by his excitement.) 'You'll be as rich as any lord among 'em.'

'I wish the lords were not so rich,' was a retort on Godfrey's tongue. But he checked it, remembering how once in the Union, when some man had ventured on such an observation, there was a cry from the Opposition benches, 'Rank revolution, sir,' the young orator responding, 'Revolution, sir—that is the very thing we want.' He laughed at the remembrance of the audacious fun, and scarcely followed his father as the latter continued,

'You'll be only young once. It is I who've made the golden eggs, and you who'll have to spend 'em. That'll be better than mooning about and wasting your time on Virgil's idles.'

'Virgil never wrote idylls; perhaps you are thinking of Theocritus?'

'I thought you wanted to be like one o' his shepherds—I read it in a translation.'

'I'm not much like a Virgilian shepherd,' answered Godfrey, with a faint smile. 'And, as to my poetry, you do your best to cure me of it. The day is a long way off, I imagine, when my ears will be gladdened with the triumph of fame, or that "softer, social fluting"

which might perhaps cost me money. Meanwhile, I have more than enough to spend on myself.'

'You have more than enough,' echoed Reuben, opening his eyes. 'You're the first youngster I ever heard say so. If you hang back in that way, you'll make me think you're in debt. Why, if you'd like to live like a Monty what-dy'e-call it, I'd find the way to let you do it! You don't go in for enough "shine," as the Spaniards have it. Be always the best-dressed man in the place. That reminds me, there's a new hunter as I want ye to buy. And the carriages—it's not much odds that we've got one already with a couple of horses,' he continued, thinking with some sort of gratification of the obsequious salutations which he had received when he had first startled the country people with his equipages and liveries. 'I want ye to drive something-like—something that will cut a splash—a four-in-hand now? What d'ye say to that?' he asked, jauntily, reproaching himself for the cloud of anxiety which was settling more and

more on the face of his son. 'From the time you were a babby, I spared ye nothing—only don't plague me about matters which do not concern ye.'

At that moment Godfrey could feel almost grateful to his father for the impassable gulf he was digging between them. There was something in Reuben's tone which sent a shiver through him, and made him feel that it would never be possible to explain that, though he cared little about money, he had not been without ambition—the ambition of standing high in the opinion of his fellow-men, and of doing his best to serve his generation. He got his temper sufficiently under to be able to answer,

'I hope I am perfectly grateful, but I prefer my dog-cart and my horse to a four-in-hand. I don't want to be a Monte Cristo.'

Unconsciously as he spoke he put his hands behind his back. To sweep the bank-notes into his pocket, as he was expected to do would be to enter into a new contract of subservience to Reuben's will, while to refuse him would be to irritate him to no purpose.

'There is Newton. I was expecting him. I must ask you to leave us together,' remarked Reuben, with the first humorous expression on his still angry face, as the sound of approaching footsteps roused Godfrey's horror of the agent, and made him retire with a sort of dignified rapidity.

'Ah—I thought as much. I won't stir a peg from my decision. He'll have to learn that I'm master, and can put my foot down as well as any of 'em, in spite of his poet's airs and graces. He's a lot to complain of with his good eating and drinking, his carriage and his servants. It's a fine thing to have everyone bowing down to you when you are young, to have all the money made for you, and not to be asked to soil a finger in workin' for it—a precious nice thing!'

CHAPTER XIV.

'As to the peoples of the American continent, beginning with the Eskimo and ending with the Terra del Fuegian, we need not say that——'

A fit of coughing interrupted the reader, which might have been accounted for by the cloud of smoke from an old-fashioned meerschaum which Sir Ralph was smoking. He was leaning back lazily in the arm-chair through which the horse-hair protruded in patches, and Vere, who was seated at his feet with a favourite greyhound crouching by her side, looked picturesque enough with her fair colouring thrown out to advantage by the faded tapestry on the walls behind her. The tapestry had once represented knights in hauberks of chain-

mail and ladies in wimples, but all were indistinguishable now in consequence of the depredations of moths and general mouldiness.

She cleared her throat and began again,

'We need not say that the continent was peopled from the west by continuous immigration, and the various tribes became strongly differentiated, in language and customs, by living widely apart, and always in a state of——'

A series of sharp little barks interrupted her again.

Vere was not sorry for the interruption. She had been reading for more than an hour, and was as tired as the dog of the newspaper and magazine reading so constantly inflicted on her without any deference to her tastes in the choice of a subject. Yet the girl never complained. Her voice rose and fell as mechanically as before, till Sir Ralph exclaimed, irritably, 'Put the creature out,' in the somewhat harsh voice to which his niece had become accustomed.

'He meant no harm,' she said, as she rose and opened the door.

The silence of the long, barely-furnished corridor—the atmosphere of which seemed to be full of romantic and historical interest—seemed to be rudely disturbed by the hoarse barks of the delighted animal, as she led him through it to the outer door, and gazed for one moment at the pale, familiar stars of the dear, homely, English sky which had taken their places, like sentinels, for the night. She gave a sigh of relief, as she had just time to nod at the Great Bear, Cassiopeia, and the Polar star, as if they had been old friends, to whom she could confide her secrets while she drew in fresh breaths of the outer air—sweet with the odours of the tangled flowers and the smell of damp earth.

Rain had fallen during the day, and she had been kept closer than usual to her increasingly difficult task of amusing her uncle. Sir Ralph was now often irritable. His normal temperament seemed to have changed. But she preferred a little artillery thunder—flashes of

anger, which might perhaps clear the air—to the vagueness with which he had hitherto answered her whenever she had inquired concerning his affairs.

She guessed that there was some important reason, kept in the background now, which, if explained to her, might excuse his increasing irritability. But she could not know that he was brooding over what had seemed to him to be the vulgar condescension of a letter received from Reuben *apropos* of herself that very morning, and that the indignity of being patronised by his upstart neighbour, and of feeling that there was no means of escaping from his clutches, was maddening him, while he pretended to be interested in the 'Eskimo.'

She returned to the room, and seated herself again in her old attitude, reading in a voice which she tried to make less listless.

'"Their physical peculiarities bespeak a common origin, and their differences——'

'There—that will do,' said her uncle, abruptly. 'Your wits are wool-gathering.'

It was true that her manner was dispirited,

and that her voice, which was usually as refreshing as a clear stream of water, had become monotonous; true, also, that the expression of her face alarmed him a little. There was a look of unconquerable will which crept into it at times, and reminded him that Vere had possibly inherited from the Rashleighs a temper which made against absolute perfection, and a strenuous hate of injustice apt to break into a flame.

She said nothing to excuse herself now, but answered by a scarcely perceptible movement of the eyebrows, as she laid down the book, and stood upright, looking across at her uncle interrogatively, with no piteous expression in her face, but with an entire absence of that fine, childlike mirth which she knew how to combine on other occasions with her underlying seriousness.

Sir Ralph had no key to the girl's thoughts, though he believed that he had a remarkably profound knowledge of womankind in general. He had often lamented, even in her presence, that his own daughter had not been a son,

who could have helped him with the difficult task of his life. A boy, who could have been churned into some sort of shape by rough treatment in a public school, would have been able to grapple with the stern realities before him. But of what use were maids? and this niece alarmed him with her large amount of undeveloped power, and her readiness to assert herself, even in a comparatively immature stage of womanhood.

'It is a pity I could never afford to let her have a proper governess, and be trained like other girls,' he thought, as she stood looking at him expectantly, with the large, dark-blue eyes which seemed to have lost their serio-playfulness.

He could guess that the spirit of opposition in her temperament, with which he had sometimes to deal, possessed her now as she stood before him—taller and fairer than any golden-centred lily that had grown in the outside garden, with a hazy lustre from the candle-light on her delicately-tinted hair.

'Beautiful as a whole,' he said discontentedly

to himself, yet with no certainty that her beauty would continue, since no one feature, as a question of perfection of lines, could be called absolutely correct. He prided himself on his well-formed taste, and could be cynically critical even of his brother's child. He knew that the little feminine methods of other women were hateful to this girl, that duplicity in others made her angry, and that, if ever on previous occasions there had been a difference of opinion between them, she had preferred to go straight to the mark. A recollection of such encounters made him a little afraid of the level, fronting eyes, and all his cut and dried maxims à la Rochefoucauld seemed to be dispersed. He was apparently bestowing his attention on the amber end of his meerschaum as Vere said suddenly, in a voice which struck sharply on his ears, and threatened to make him lose his presence of mind,

'It hurts me that you should treat me with so little confidence.'

'How so?'

He kept his eyes fixed on his pipe, and con-

sidered how it would be possible to make her understand that the want of confidence of which she complained had in reality been the instinctive concealment of the disquietude which he had begun to feel respecting her.

How much better it would have been for this uncomfortable project of his, if his niece had been like most girls of her age—with a mind like a sheet of white paper on which he might transcribe all that suited his purpose—instead of being a young woman of many theories, sometimes dogmatic in spite of her simplicity.

'Why are you so short with me?'

'So short!'

'I mean so cold—so irresponsive. I know you have something weighing on you now. Why cannot you open your heart to me?'

Sir Ralph did not speak for some moments. When he did so, he parried her question with another.

'I thought you would have a definite announcement to make very soon to *me*. By the way, you are twenty, are you not?'

'Yes, uncle, but——'

'It is natural I should be desirous to know how matters stand. I hope you are not going to visit the father's sins upon the very inoffensive son. It is, as I said bofore, an absurdity for you to talk of marrying a man who has not plenty of money. Whoever has *you*, must expect to pay a heavy price for your hand.'

A crimson colour rushed to her temples. Hitherto she had been proud of her uncle, because she had considered him so perfect a gentleman. But now it seemed incredible that he who had so often been cold, who had refused to notice her or appreciate her, should be so ready for his own purposes to scheme for this marriage. There was a point at which she must assert her human rights. She was determined to tell him that she would have nothing to do with a scheme in which she was to be used by a rich man as one of his levers. She had never heard much of the claims for women's emancipation, but a chord had been struck in her nature which suddenly began to vibrate. A whole category of women's rights seemed to be ready for assertion, as something of defiance

blazed up in her flaming cheeks. She had determined to tell her uncle that she had nothing of that false sentiment which made other girls ready to offer themselves as a sort of filial holocaust; that she would rather continue to exercise any amount of thrift than marry for the sake of living objectless, luxurious days; and that she had fortunately not been educated in the benighted times when young women could be treated like dolls and kept in ignorance of all sorts of things which were necessary for them to know.

But all her words forsook her at the crisis. The dilating of her nostrils and the tightening of her hands, as if she would plunge the nails into their delicate palms, betrayed something of the inward tumult of her feelings. She hated herself for the strong, ungovernable anger which seemed to sweep over her, making her shiver and feel fevered when she needed all her courage, and felt it necessary to assume the unruffled calm of a philosopher.

She choked back the rising tears, and said, in a tone of inquiry which she attempted to keep steady,

'Our fortunes must have fallen low indeed?'

It was *she* now who was the inquisitor, and was unconsciously applying the torture-screw. The moisture stood on Sir Ralph's forehead as he answered, also dropping his voice,

'So low that the ordinary reason for such a match is quadrupled.'

She had expected some such announcement, but received it in blank silence. Her uncle gained courage as she stood pondering. There was something of his old manner '*de haut en bas*' which had always somewhat fretted her, as he added, in explanation,

'It seems that our family history has a romantic interest for these people. The son cannot do without you.'

Her eyes flashed, and she put up her hand as if warning him to be silent.

'He told you so himself?' she asked.

'His father did. Come, you must be reasonable. Reuben Sellwood is a good sort of fellow up to his lights. Only a little more plain-spoken than we are in our world, you know. But, after all, what he says is the truth.'

He began to talk rapidly about mortgages, unfortunate investments, and the tendency of other people's money to accumulate like an avalanche. He risked cheerful prognostications as if to convince himself. He did not think his niece capable of not being able to rise to the emergency. He comforted himself by reflecting that she was too healthy to develop nervous fancies and morbid humours.

She stood as if turned into stone. It might have been for want of something to say. He supposed that his revelations must have overruled her scruples, but saw that no good was to be gained by continuing the conversation.

PART IV.

She rose,
As in the act to speak. The sudden thought,
And unconsidered impulse led her on. Yet anon
With recollections clear, august, sublime,
Of God's great truth and right immutable,
Which, as obedient vassals to her mind,
Came summoned by her will.

CLOUGH.

CHAPTER I.

MEANWHILE, after the unusual curiosity and excitement caused by the arrival of the mysterious owner of Broadmeads, Torringmoor and its environs had relapsed into something like dulness.

Not only did Reuben Sellwood remain an enigma, but the 'son of the millionaire,' as Godfrey was called, seemed to be likely to prove as disappointing as his father.

Godfrey's appearance had been pronounced pleasing to the eye, and his manners, though somewhat reserved, had been said to be those of a gentleman. But he too showed a provoking inclination to prefer the pieces of symbolic pasteboard, left at Broadmeads with a

view to making his acquaintance, to seeing the people themselves. Some suggested that his pride would be ready to kick at the tone of patronage too likely to be adopted towards him as the son of a *parvenu*, and that it was only natural a young fellow of any spirit should resent the patronising graciousness of the grandees of the neighbourhood. Others had another theory that his health was constitutionally delicate, and that—with the exception of occasionally visiting his club, where he read a good deal, was properly polite, but made no intimate friendships with anyone—he had been condemned by medical advice to lead the life of an anchorite.

It favoured this theory that Godfrey had latterly hidden himself a good deal in his private grounds, preferring to walk rather than to drive, and creeping out like the owls and bats to visit the cottages in lanes and fields. Some surmised that his tastes were 'decidedly low,' quoting proverbs, which were not the most refined, to prove that the ears of swine were not convenient material for the manufac-

ture of silk purses, and that that which was bred in the bone would be sure to come out in the blood. The inventive skill of the Torringmoor folks was really most interesting on this occasion. It showed a love for fiction latent in the feeblest imaginations, But not only were the cleverest people in Torringmoor beating their heads ineffectually against the closed door of a mystery—Godfrey found himself puzzling over it also.

If Vere Rashleigh hated his father, as it was natural under the circumstances that she should hate him, the filial relationship on his part remained obligatory. With all Reuben's faults, the fact still remained that he *was* his father. Reuben had not advanced one step to meet him in any of his benevolent projects. Godfrey was checkmated and ashamed. Though Mr. Sellwood had gloried in giving money to certain subscriptions that his name might figure on printed lists, sooner or later the fact must become known that the people who came under his pitiless rule were made to crawl and kneel in the miry clay, at the

foot of a most degraded Mammon. The desperate obstinacy which possessed Reuben in refusing to consult anybody about the management of his property, was as perplexing as his odd determination to humble the pride of the Rashleigh family. In an unguarded moment he had said before his son that he would bring Sir Ralph 'on his marrow-bones' before he had done with him. Now, it did not lessen Godfrey's anxieties that he began for the first time to speculate as to why his father had so skilfully laid his schemes for years to buy up nearly all the territory which had belonged to this particular family. He could not suspect him of any causeless animosity. The desire to purchase an ancestral estate, and to settle down as a landed proprietor among people—who could be taught on which side their bread was buttered, and be compelled to pay some sort of deference to the fabulous wealth of a man whom they might otherwise shun as an upstart—was not so strange as that there should be an ulterior motive affecting the well-being of Sir Ralph Rashleigh and his niece.

If any such motive existed, there was the possibility that it might be excusable instead of mean or unworthy, and Godfrey was bound to allow the utmost for this possibility.

Yet the uncertainty was a fruitful source for mental uneasiness.

'And oh, the wretchedness of inheriting this money,' he said, more than once to himself, with all the agony of a conscientious nature of which Reuben had not the faintest comprehension. Money, which had been amassed he did not know by what methods. How he wished he could make it flow back into the sources from which it came! Of one thing he was perfectly determined, that he would not be Reuben's accomplice, or take take part in any transactions of which he did not thoroughly approve. On another point he had also made up his mind. He would himself visit the sick, and supply the wants of the most needy, and he would do so in such a way as to make the people think that Reuben had given him money for the purpose of relieving their wants.

A dozen schemes and ideas filled his brain, but he would have nothing to do with shifty business morality. All thought of love for Vere had fled for a time before the discovery that he was to be imposed upon her, under circumstances that would be love-destroying. He would take advantage of no woman in a case like that. He would go away, if possible—he would resist the temptation. The bare suspicion that his father intended to use him as a sort of cat's-paw for a scheme which was probably a mean one, made him hot with vexation and shame, and he determined if possible to keep away from Vere.

Half-way between Broadmeads and the town of Torringmoor—just at this crisis—lived a rich widow of the name of Austin. Whispering and meanness, with underhand dealings of all kinds, were detestable to her. Mrs. Austin was on the shady side of middle-life, and had made the best of her privileges in assuming betimes for herself the kindly prerogatives which are supposed to belong to the 'old.' Generously

modelled, if a trifle too richly coloured, with the large, well-shaped hands of a capable woman, famed for her well-managed household and perfect appointments, she had succeeded more than once in putting down unkindly gossip.

Few chattering women, whether belonging to the 'county families' or to the more easily cowed Torringmoor matrons, who could not affirm that they had had 'grandfathers,' could bear the scrutiny of her steady eyes as she would say,

'Dear me! May I ask to whom all this refers? I am rather confused between the individual and the universal. May I ask if all these observations are to be taken in the general, or if you could vouch for them in a court of law. I have somehow got into the habit of referring half the talk I hear rather to the neuter than to the masculine or feminine.'

Nevertheless, in spite of her common-sense, which was sometimes slightly dashed with cynicism, Mrs. Austin had a kindly nature, and prided herself on having deserved on more than

one occasion the 'küppel-pelz,' or reward given by our German neighbours to the person who has been clever enough to bring about a match. She was capable also of arranging the most heterogeneous blossoms in the same social flower-beds. She was not one of those women from whose tongues endearing epithets fall glibly, but she was fond of young girls, and had a natural liking for young men. She had formed her own somewhat sanguine opinions about the new-comers at Broadmeads, and while she thought that the father needed only a woman's humanizing influence to lead him into tractable habits, she concluded that the son was really in frail health, and that he shrank, with the sensitiveness of one who was acutely nervous, from being thrust amongst persons who might either toady him for his money, or whose condescension might irritate his pride.

'We must try to shake him out of it,' she said to herself. 'But what is one to do? His is the sort of nature which is apt to withdraw altogether into its shell, and to ad-

minister a gentle prick would be worse than useless.'

Nevertheless, she issued invitations for a garden-party to which the people who remained in the neighbourhood in the month of August were specially invited, not excepting the owner of Broadmeads as well as the county magnates.

'My dear, they will be rather pleased than otherwise to meet each other. I must go through with it now. When once I have placed myself in the position of attempting these sort of experiments, it would be sheer cowardice to back out of it,' she answered one of her intimate friends, who reminded her that the owner of Broadmeads not only occasionally muted his h's, but was beginning to have a bad name in the neighbourhood for his undue severity to his poorer tenants. 'I make a point of never cutting anyone—and never sending anyone to Coventry pointedly—it is the worst possible taste. Besides,' she added, dropping her voice, 'there will be an end to all these inuendoes when Sir Ralph's niece marries, as you will see

she will, this Godfrey Sellwood who is, after all, an uncommon-looking person.'

Reuben Sellwood did not accept the invitation. But Mrs. Austin managed to bring her persuasive arts to work so successfully upon Godfrey that he could not without rudeness back out of the quasi-engagement which he formed, for the sake of not being rude to a lady, when she purposely waylaid him on one of his walks in the gloaming.

Meanwhile, the clever woman—who was accustomed to say to the younger friends of her sex, 'My dear, you must not gossip,' accompanying the motherly admonition with a little playful tap of her fan—managed to keep the monopoly of kindly chatter to herself, and set the ball going skilfully respecting Godfrey's devotion to Vere.

'It is no wonder anyone should be smitten with that girl with her taking face—a little quaint, perhaps, and with no great regularity of feature, but with a mouth as fresh as a rose-bud, and eyes you can never forget—dark in the centres—but with that colour which they call

"bleu de roi," when you see it in Sevres china, about the irises—— Although I am stupid to mention it; for, after all, one knows that it is not the looks, but the mind and soul which are of real importance,' would be her invariable peroration.

Mrs. Austin thought a good deal about Vere in the days which intervened before the giving of her garden-party. It was not Miss Rashleigh's fault, as she was in the habit of remarking, that she should be called 'Vere,' which seemed to recall the haughty creature in Tennyson's poems, and was after all 'a senseless sort of name.' 'But all these things have a sort of fashion. It is one of the advantages of growing old,' she said, confidentially to one of her friends, smoothing affectionately her few grey hairs, 'that I can remember the days when girls were christened "Charlotte" in remembrance of the "Sorrows of Werter," or "Sophia," in honour of the "Vicar of Wakefield."'

She was shrewd enough to suspect that something had gone wrong if there had

really been any love affair between the two young people, but reminded herself that accessibility was a great point in matters of the heart, and that if the feelings of either had been hurt by the misfortune of possessing mismanaging male guardians rather than sensible mothers, it might be her part to propose some slightly modified arrangement.

CHAPTER II.

Good-natured Mrs. Austin prided herself on a superstition which prevailed in the neighbourhood that whenever she entertainsd she was certain to have 'Queen's weather.'

The sky was blue and the sun was shining when the carriages drew up to her pretty but unassuming house, with abundance of stained glass in the hall, and a mat inscribed 'Salve' on the inlaid tiles. There were dogs of all varieties to greet the guests, from a little greyhound, which Landseer would have liked to paint, to a bright-eyed King Charles, whose elegant proportions had been damaged like those of his mistress by an inclination to embonpoint. There were sleek horses in the sur-

rounding meadows and fine Alderneys grazing in the shade. The very maid-servants who presided over the tea and coffee (Mrs. Austin always set her face against the introduction of men-servants into her house) looked trim and well-kept in snowy white aprons and caps. The lawn was indeed not immaculate of daisies. But the widow loved the 'wee, modest crimson-tipped' flowers, as much as Burns loved them, and always declared that her income did not allow her to vie with her richer neighbours in employing enough gardeners to cut her grass.

The girls whom Mrs. Austin had invited were mostly pleasant and pretty to look at, though in this as in other matters the lady scorned to limit herself to inviting the damsels of any particular 'set.' There were girls of the pensive beauty *rôle*, and girls with a dash of fastness supposed to give a flavour to their talk; girls dressed in quaker-like hues of drab and grey, and others in a brilliancy of tint like tropical birds.

There were plenty of good-looking young fellows, with easy, assured manners, to flirt with

them in the intervals of that now by-gone croquet which was then an easy amusement as compared with the harder and less idyllic lawn-tennis. The tennis-player of to-day must be a hundred times more ready, agile, and attentive than her fore-runner of the croquet-field, who could dawdle through a pastime in which balls could be driven at leisure between facile hoops, before all games—including croquet itself—had the misfortune to become over-scientific and fatiguing.

Both Godfrey and Vere instinctively avoided the bait of croquet. The former had no suspicion that he had to thank his well-meaning hostess—who gave out that he was as good as engaged—for the fact that no one pressed him to take a mallet. In ignorance of this, his meeting with Vere was unexpectedly free from constraint. If he had not felt himself to be quite equal to meeting her on the same footing as before, she on her side tried to show neither vexation or shame-facedness. An acute observer might possibly have guessed that her cheerfulness was somewhat forced, and that the apparent indif-

ference with which she wandered away, in company with one of Mrs. Austin's matronly friends, to the shadier walks of the grounds, was possibly assumed.

When the sun had set—leaving the sky with its blush of pink, and its rifts of pale green light still between the sunset clouds—busy preparations were being made for the evening dance, which was always an important part of the programme at Mrs. Austin's garden-parties. A canvas passage lined with rows of pyramidical azaleas and fanlike palms had been prepared for the refreshments, and led into the house where those guests could retire whose limbs were no longer young enough to desire to keep time to the scraping of fiddle-strings. But under an awning at the head of the lawn were musicians with harps and violins, and strains of a brilliant waltz were intermingled with the rippling of laughter and the chirping of voices as the young people began to dance on the turf. Young and old somehow lingered as the coloured oil lamps which had been hung

on the adjacent trees lit up a scene which was as unusual as it was pretty.

'Ah, well, it does not matter, there is plenty of ventilation for us all in the open air,' laughed kindly Mrs. Austin, as she noticed that the house was abandoned, 'the mixture of all ages gives a charm to the scene—the white locks and the fresh young cheeks—how very much more charming the contrast than the fabled gift of eternal youth. Now, I call it quite pleasant when one grows old oneself to be able to witness the gyrations of the young ones. How does it feel?' she added, turning to Godfrey; 'don't you feel as if you are a spirit set free from inconvenient gravitation?—I am afraid that simile of mine is ridiculous rather than sublime,' seeing from something in his face that he did not like her choice of long words.

'I confess I am an infrequent dancer,' answered the 'son of the millionaire,' with a touch of that refined hauteur which is supposed to belong to another class.

'Ah, I see,' she answered, as she looked significantly at some of the girls, like pretty wax

dolls, whose faces wore perpetual smiles and whose voices rose and fell in soft interchange of remark to the men on whose arms they leant as they floated past them in the dance, 'your heart is elsewhere—at your books or with your landscaps paintings. What a pity, you look as if you ought to be a good dancer.'

Once only had Vere appeared among the dancers, and then the simplicity of her attire had been noteworthy, and had possibly furnished her with a good excuse for speedy withdrawal. But how kind had been the gaze of her bright, clear-looking eyes, how frank and pleasant her gentle forehead, how playful and natural the curves of her rosy lips! Godfrey, watching her more closely, thought he saw a slight change in her—a change that he could not fail to attribute to something which had taken place since their last conversation. He was glad that she at least lived in no atmosphere of conventionality. For he had in one respect been a true son of the people. He had often thought, 'How can men bear with all those little airs and graces among girls, this posing

and acting, this mincing as they go, as if it were not a world of reality and earnestness, and close to us, even in this very neighbourhood, sorrow, deprivation, misery, sickness, and death?'

He did not mean to be hard on the enjoyment of the other women; but some instinct seemed to drive him to leave the crowded lawn, tired of the shimmer of silk and the rustle of lace, and to loiter in one of the side-walks illuminated with Chinese lanterns in which Vere—with some cloud-like wraps round her head and shoulders—had taken refuge not far from her older chaperon. The seat which she had chosen was close to a mossy bank. A cedar with its velvety branches and a couple of ancient beech-trees overshadowed the seat. Vere's hands were filled with some pretty crimson fungi, and near her stood her late partner, somewhat younger than herself, who had plucked the fungi for her and looked as if he would very much like to renew a conversation.

'Happy boy,' thought Godfrey, with a jealous pang, 'there is no barrier between them as there is between us.'

'Take care you don't poison yourselves,' he said, as he drew near to them. 'How is it you have hidden yourself here?'

'I think it is a lovely spot,' she said, with one of her bright smiles.

'You are easily contented, you think everything lovely.'

'Oh, but this is a dear old place. I have a special fondness for these beeches.'

'But is it fair to hide yourself? You are losing all that is going on.'

'About a dozen people have been here to look after me. I assure you I am not at all neglected.'

Her clear eyes and her still smile did not prevent him from noticing a faint pallor, and that new expression in the face which seemed to foreshadow something—he knew not what. It was noticeable that he did not ask her to dance—the recollection of his last conversation with her was yet too vivid. But he dropped into the seat beside her as soon as the other man had left, and understood something of the new expression which had puzzled him when she said, softly,

'I have heard of your kindness to the Hargreaves.'

'You heard of it?'

'Of course, they told me—didn't you know I visit them?'

'We can talk of it better to-morrow,' he said, a little impulsively, his heart beating with pleasure at her slight encouragement, 'if you will come into the wilderness, as you used to. There are two or three plans I should like to tell you of,' he answered, in a low tone, under cover of the semi-darkness.

Nothing apparently had happened, and yet the girl's heart was stirred by some new antagonism. And the man knew that he dreaded that interview which was to take place on the morrow. It had been revealed to him as if by a lightning's flash that, because Fate seemed to require of him that he should choose this woman as his wife, the woman's will would probably be set with all its force and strength in the opposite direction. Dame Fate seemed to be a nuisance, even as far as his own feelings were concerned; she hindered spontaneity and rubbed the bloom from the thing.

Hours passed. The majority of these foolish young people were still spinning in the dance, while it seemed to ordinary observers that, though Godfrey still lingered in Vere's proximity, both he and she were in a mood alien to jollity. A few of the dancers, like children tired with sport, were resting in corners of the grounds, or behind the fan-like branches of palms in the canvas passages. Godfrey tried to get a little comfort from the fact that the smile had died on the lips of more than one of Miss Rashleigh's admirers who had sought her again and again, and who had not unnaturally objected to another man being the witness of their discomfiture.

At the repeated 'No, thank you. I am very comfortable here,' the would-be dancers retired altogether as if unwilling to risk another repulse.

'It is the taint of pride in her blood,' thought Godfrey, who had never seen her under such circumstances before. 'Pity that a nature so noble should be contaminated by this detestable pride. Yet it served that last fellow right. He was too self-conscious.'

The chaperon, who knew that Mrs. Austin was interested, and who had been 'looking after' Vere to gratify the fancy of her friend,—having been privately assured by the hostess that 'she had not brought a lot of people together for nothing,'—gave much the same account of the girl's treatment of young Sellwood.

'Very snubbing to him,' said that lady, by no means disconcerted at the failure of her plan, 'but, do you know, they say that is the way in which some of our sex begin—by snubbing the man whom they mean afterwards to favour.'

Nevertheless, Mrs. Austin took occasion to saunter in the direction of the secluded walk and that seat by the beeches. She saw for herself, as she afterwards declared, that the lad could at times be very serious and self-contained. Why could he not speak out; she had no patience with him! Her supposed omniscience about the affairs of the heart led her to suppose that the two were at variance, and that it might soon be too late for either of them to practise frankness. Her theory was endorsed

by the fact that, when Godfrey rose, Vere bowed to him as calmly as if she had been a young lady of fashion anxious to get out of an engagement with a partner who did not please her.

Unfortunately for the progress of affairs, Mrs. Austin made up her mind to speak to her young friend that night as soon as her other guests had departed. It was easy to put her plan into practice, for Vere—who was occupying a bedroom in Mrs. Austin's house for greater convenience and by special invitation—was sitting at the dressing table brushing her long fair hair as the elder lady entered, and began to caress the soft silken masses which fell in a shimmer of pale gold below the young girl's waist.

'How long it is!' she said, by way of commencing conversation, and conscious that the blue eyes were gazing at her with an almost defiant expression from beneath the overhanging tresses, like the eyes of a shy animal within the covert.

'*Somebody* admires it very much,' she said, after a pause, in which she found it somewhat

difficult to begin. 'It is not difficult to guess who it is.'

A blush had sprung up in the girl's face, for she had suspected her friend's strategy; but, as if determined to ward off further questions, she said, with a laugh,

'Do you mean Mr. De Courcy?'

'De Courcy is poor and as proud of his birth as you are—you would not have a penny between you,' answered her inquisitor. 'No, you know perfectly well whom I mean. There are depths of perception included in your simplicity. Do you know that I think you are rather fond of having your own way?'

Vere, who was blushing scarlet, would have found it impossible to answer these insinuations directly. But the way in which she raised her eyebrows with an air of incredulity seemed to answer for her,

'Do you indeed?'

'Yes, and I am very sorry for your poor uncle, and for the little cousin whom you profess to love. Certainly it is from your uncle that you inherit this strong will, and he on his side—his

pride will certainly keep him from speaking out to you. Do you know that this man will have little short of millions. My dear, consider, be a little practical for once. Many men would be glad to accumulate money, but in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the inclination stops short of fruition. Now in this case the capital has been left to accumulate till——'

The listener could bear it no longer. A frantic desire had grown in her to push away the well-meaning lady, whose grace and amiability had led her so successfully to act the part of mother to many bereft damsels. But Mrs. Austin had so placed herself that the slightest movement on the part of her victim would infallibly have knocked her over.

Vere's breath came quickly, and wild schemes were being formed in her brain as the unconscious tormenter continued,

'Lots of girls would be glad to be in your place. Society used to exact birth and manners, but now-a-days it exacts—money.'

The girl stood looking at her stupidly and vacantly. In her readiness to accuse herself,

it seemed to her as if she must have done something that was wrong for any one to venture to speak to her, of a subject which should only be treated reverently, in that hard and common-place manner. Yet even in her excitement it struck her, with a sense of humour, that Mrs. Austin spoke of Society sympathetically and caressingly, as if she were a delicately organised female friend.

'Now I admit that in this case the father seems to belong to the true Bohemian class—how he made his way people don't exactly know. But believe me, my dear, people will never inquire. He seems to be a most convenient old gentleman, determined to hide himself from public view. And you,' continued the good woman, emboldened by Vere's silence, 'why, it would be like actual wickedness—wickedness to your own uncle, for you to do nothing to relieve him of his anxieties—I might even say his debts. Will you let him die with——'

At the risk of removing the mask which she had carefully worn till now for the sake of the dignity of her family, the outraged girl at last

found her voice. It seemed to have changed from a clear soprano to a contralto, strangled in the lower notes, as she answered,

'I do not acknowledge anybody's right to press me to marry any man—not even the right of my own uncle.'

'That is not practical. Excuse me, it is highflown nonsense—there is the man ready to marry you, and there is the money—that is partly why I have spoken to you.'

Mrs. Austin had let her arms fall, and Vere, observing the opportunity, rose to her full height.

'He has never given me the chance of which you speak. Certainly we had a few words about it some time ago, but latterly we have had so little conversation.'

'That's unfortunate.'

'Unfortunate for *me* and my supposed attractions, you mean. I daresay it is.'

The girl had an abrupt way of unexpectedly turning the assumption against herself, and putting an end to the conversation, which took Mrs. Austin by surprise.

She had a shrewd nature, as well as a kind one, prompt to recognise a mistake, and she began to deplore her own misconception and to be somewhat indignant with the girl's uncle, when, after a moment or two of inward struggle, her young guest answered, in that altered voice,

'Oh, don't you see that it is a joke?'

CHAPTER III.

A CERTAIN fear underlay Vere's bolder feelings as reminding herself of the words, 'Will you do nothing to relieve his anxieties—will you let him die?' she returned to her uncle the next morning. He noticed that she looked cold and white, that her eyes were cast down, and tried to find out whether anything had been accomplished by Mrs. Austin's mediation or by the meeting on the previous evening.

He saw that a change had passed over his niece, and that there was a new sort of despairing tone in the way in which she answered, 'You are always harping on that string,' as he spoke about his difficulties. The shade of annoyance did not escape him.

'And you are always a good girl,' he said,

in a tone of encouragement, which he had not been apt to use to her.

'I try to be good, though not always in your way,' she said, with a sort of smile, in which a little humour lingered, but with a conscience not altogether clear.

It was hard that—when her life seemed to be commencing in real earnest—it should be so difficult to remind her uncle that she was not only grown up, but had a right to that independence which should belong to every reasonable human being. That she—because she was an unprotected orphan—should have that independence taken away from her; or that—worse still—she should be made the accomplice of a sort of intrigue was not to be tolerated. The openness of her character made her not only rebel, but determine to free herself from any entanglement, whatever it might cost her. She would not engage in any conflict of words, but there was a look in her face which made Sir Ralph a little afraid.

'If you have anything to tell me,' he continued, anxiously, 'I shall be glad to hear it.'

'Thank you,—we live in an out-of-the-way corner of the world, and it is the rarest thing for me to have anything new to tell.'

The tenacity with which he approached the subject, irritated her. She could not get over the feeling that she was to be offered to another man on humiliating terms; the very idea of it filled her with shame and loathing. She walked rapidly when she found herself in the open air, up and down the path in the wilderness with the tragic air of one who is torn to pieces by conflicting feelings ; the greater was merged into the lesser, she almost forgot the small conventionalities of custom and habit. She rather prided herself on not making a show of being sympathetic. It had always seemed to her a little absurd that other women should be so easily moved to laughter or to tears. Owing to the circumstances of her life, and to the responsibilities which had brought premature womanhood upon her, she was, as a rule, self-poised, and with nerves equal to any occasion.

She did not like losing her placidity, and

made an effort to control the immoderate emotion which was taking possession of her. She succeeded to a certain extent. But Godfrey could not fail to notice that her face had grown a little hard, and that her eyes were, for the first time, almost wild with some intense feeling which he could not comprehend.

The very weather seemed to be against his chances of success. But a few days before he had passed her near the moor, unknown to her, and had gazed fascinated at one of those pictures which remain photographed on the memory. Vere had been sitting on the trunk of a tree which overhung the water, the birds singing overhead, Dot and some little friends, younger than herself, clustered round her, the little ones laughing, and Vere's own rosy face—free from the look of care which sometimes shadowed it—dimpled with smiles, as she sat on her rustic throne like a queen. The 'little savage,' as Godfrey had sometimes christened Dot, was certainly a good deal spoiled by Sir Ralph. But the child, bounding and rushing about in the buoyancy of health, had

seemed to have something in common with the blessed sunshine, with the trees, the flowers, and the fresh perfume of the summer. One could imagine how she felt in every vein of her body the joyful intoxication of her physical life, till she seemed to communicate some of this animal exhilaration, this bounding sense of freedom to all around her. Theoretically, the young man held ideas about the management of children which were much opposed to Sir Ralph's plan of bringing up his only child. But when he had seen Vere surrounded by these merry little ones—all chattering like starlings—he had acknowledged to himself that any sort of pessimism would be inexcusable in the presence of such sunbeams. He had got over his prejudice against the child, and yet he had ventured so far as to suggest the possibility that Vere Rashleigh should come to meet him, and *alone*.

He had dreaded the presence of a precocious child, and had judged from the girl's disposition that he should have more hope for his suit, if he could get her to meet him in the free, open air, and so avoid the stiff conventionalities of calling on her in the house.

Something in the atmosphere of that home seemed to be chilling and fatal to all spontaneity, and he had never yet asked for Miss Rashleigh without her uncle.

When the plan had first occurred to him as he was smoking and half-dreaming over a book, it had seemed to him a good one. But looked at now, in the prosaic light of a dull, commonplace day, he began to fear that the request had been a liberty, as he advanced to meet her, with a face which wore a smile, yet a smile which was by no means confident.

Meadow-sweet was blooming, mixed with the tall spikes of the purple lythrum, on the borders of the stream, and ever afterwards the penetrating sweetness of the subtle odour of those blossoms seemed to be associated with the conversation which followed. The brilliant weather of the previous days had suddenly changed, The morning was damp and uninviting, with a stifling feeling in the air. A few drops of rain fell every now and then, and desultory gleams of watery sunshine occasionally struggled in vain to disperse the gathering clouds. There was not a breath of wind to be

felt; not a bird or insect stirred, not a leaf fell.

But Vere, in her state of unusual mental excitement, was unconscious of the rain which fell upon her face. She had weighed her power against the forces which seemed to be arrayed against her. The circumstances were strong, but she thought herself to be stronger.

After a few moments of awkward constraint, during which they fenced with common-places about the weather, she made a desperate rush at abrupt speech; for had she not determined to take the initiative, and deprive Godfrey of the advantage of getting out his pawns first?

'What do you want of me? Is it anything about the poor people?' she asked, in a voice which seemed to imply, 'I mean to play my part well.'

The voice was tremulous, in spite of her resolve, and the eyes—which were bright with that indefinable restlessness which had attracted his attention when he saw her coming to meet him—gave him an annihilating look, at which, under other circumstances, he would have been inclined to smile.

He noticed that her head was thrown back,

her lips pressed together, and that her fingers were interlaced in a fashion which she had when she wished to give herself strength to say a difficult thing.

The style of her address was so strange that he did not answer. There was interrogation in his look, a sort of surprise, but he had not the slightest inclination to laugh. The woman's emotion had communicated itself to him. He felt his pulses start; he was full of intense expectation.

'I suppose you think you have a *right* to invite me here.' It was as if she had said, 'I wonder the ghosts of the Rashleighs don't rise to disabuse you of the idea. Every inch of this ground has been trodden by the feet of my ancestors.'

'Ah, you think that my father robbed you of this piece of ground?' he answered, surprised at her defiant tone. 'You are mistaken there. He bought it fairly. There was no robbery in the case.'

'There is no occasion for us to argue about *that*. I don't dispute your right,' she answered, with no hurry of manner or sign of being

affronted at the quick retort which was unusual with him. ''We have to deal with matters as they stand. I am a girl, and do not pretend to go into all these business affairs. But it has been explained to me that the property is not what it was—I believe no landed property is—and my uncle, because he doesn't wish to grind down the people, would only have been likely to make a worse paying thing of it than before. You know as well as I do that it is no fault of *his* if he is deeply in debt, and if—if there are what they call mortgages on the estates, and that the estates themselves belong more or less to your father.'

She felt that she was already becoming almost bookish, although she really knew nothing of law, and would have to seem a good deal more so before the interview was ended. If either of the two could have seen the humorous side of the matter, instead of being so desperately in earnest, they might have understood each other, without more need of studied speech. But Vere's nerves were too agitated for her to be as sensible as usual, and every pulse in the

man's body was throbbing now. He fired at the thought that she should ask questions in so direct a way, as if her superior position gave her a right to question, or to express her opinions plainly. He would have liked to answer that, if *he* had anything to do with the matter, he would never evict a tenant, and that he had already incurred his father's anger by vehemently denouncing the behaviour of the present agent in his dealings with the people. He was ready to assure her that, if ever the property came into his own hands, he would see that the factor, or agent, of the estate should be chosen for the justice and liberality of his administration. He would dismiss Newton at once, make the little farm-holdings as comfortable as possible, raise the wages of the labourers, and then he believed that the present agrarian difficulties would be quite easy of adjustment.

But her unexpected mode of address made him feel as if he had nothing to answer. And she continued—as if her ideas had been in some way arranged between the snatches of sleep which had visited her on the preceding night—

'You are aware as well as I that our elders seem to have hit upon a plan, which strikes them as a good one, for sparing my uncle grief. I do not suppose that you have much to do with it, but it would be absurd for me to imagine that you are not aware of it as well as I. Indeed, your invitation to me to present myself before you at your bidding this morning, as if you were King Ahasuerus and I poor Vashti, proves that you are a party to the—conspiracy.'

He made a deprecating movement, for his heart had leaped to his mouth, and he would have liked to say, 'Ah! I see—you cannot hide it from me—you do not come to me of your own accord,' but he saw that she did not wish him to reply at once, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he restrained himself from interrupting her.

'Wait till I have done,' seemed to be conveyed to him by a wave of her hand, and he stood helplessly listening whilst she continued a sort of speech in which her soul seemed to take no part. The sad plaintiveness in her voice had touched him a little, but the perfect

deliberateness of her authoritative manner surprised him more than ever as she continued,

'If conspiracy is too strong a word, I will withdraw it. I mean to be perfectly polite, but I must ask you to forgive me if I am unable to restrain the utterance of some truths which may seem bitter. I am not really bitter —I am disappointed and humiliated.'

There was another pause. The colour was still on her lips, though it had flown from her cheeks, and the excess of some feeling which he was unable to understand had given a deeper intensity to her eyes as she added, with more passion than she had shown before,

'*You have* tried to humiliate me—you need not deny it. Do not think that I care for it personally, but it strikes me, as it must strike you, that—that the amount of feeling which you have for me must be terribly slender, when you can claim a woman's hand because others dictate to you.'

He interrupted her now. The undemonstrative manner which she had hitherto adopted, as if with the intention of repressing advances,

had taken away his power of speech, but the wild anger which seemed to be rising up in her helped him to respond.

'There can be no thought of claiming a thing which should be freely given; I—I had hoped—'

'Go on,' she said, in a way which effectually stopped him, 'I am here to listen to whatever you have to say to me that is serious and pressing. I understand that you have learnt your lesson, and I ought to let you repeat it. But, considering that we can reckon up the few hours of our acquaintance, does it not strike you that to count on being accepted after so slight a knowledge of a girl might seem to her little short of an indignity?'

'I counted on nothing.'

'No?—then I beg your pardon, it was your father who was so certain. Tell him I will be discreet and not take too great an advantage of his intended kindness,' she continued, with that strange scorn in her voice. 'Why need we make any pretences about it! I perfectly understand that I stand face to face with the man whose father has power over my unfor-

tunate uncle, and that father wishes me to favour his son. We are neither of us good at acting, and it is useless for me to pretend not to know that—monstrous as it seems—my hand is to be thrown-in as part of this property, and that, if I dare to refuse, my relations will suffer. Is not that true?'

She asked the question looking straight into his face, and with that look which told him that she had counted on his being ready to quail at the reproach conveyed in her eyes. Yet her passion was mastering her now. She had planned the scheme deliberately, intending to pride herself on her skilful reservations, and the coil which she should inextricably twine round her own real feelings. But she could no longer control her natural womanliness. Shame, anger, a sense of outrage, and a vehement desire to revenge herself upon some one showed themselves by turns in her mobile face. Perhaps the shame predominated, for she was painfully conscious that she had lost her usual coolness, and the clearness of her head, and was being hurried in her excitement

into saying more than she meant. A suitor who could be drawn into any underhand scheme to win her had to be confronted like an enemy; but, somehow, Godfrey looked little like an enemy as he stood gazing at her—discomfited and surprised.

Her own consciousness of her transformation from her usual calmness and modesty, and of how that transformation must be astonishing the man to whom she spoke, suddenly flooded her cheeks and neck with scarlet and she hid her burning face for a moment in her hands, as she said—making a vain attempt to resume the forced politeness of a society tone,

'There are some people who are accustomed to treat these things as a jest. I hope you don't think—I mean—I don't want you to think that I am one of those people. I—I am not turning you or anything else into ridicule. I only think that in a sort of thing which has to be stopped, for your sake as well as mine, definitely—it—it is better to be frank.'

'I scarcely know what to think,' he answered, slowly, gazing with a dazed sensation of un-

reality at the girl who had hitherto seemed to be his dream-incarnation, his ideal found. It was true he had had a sort of feeling that the next minute she would laugh, and say it was all a hoax. 'Surely you *do* mean it for a farce,' he faltered.

'And you are going to say that the farce is unworthy of any woman?' she answered, pressing her fingers on the dry, aching balls of her eyes, and still setting her will resolutely on the repression of an odd remorse about the sayings of the strange new self which had been performing such an unconventional feat.

'I know it must seem horrible. But was it *I* who invented it? Was it I who made it the only way out of a more horribly false position? Ah, I daresay you are like most men, and know little of the feelings of most women. Oh! *my* feelings are of secondary importance, of course,' —the 'oh' had popped out before she knew it, and she recognised at once that she was coming down from her stilts and swerving from the programme in which she had determined not to let herself be weak, finding her only alternative

with a fresh sting, and, conquering her indications of weakness, she continued,

'No; I make no pretence to be what I am not. There is apparently no room in my life for romance. But I hate the cold, shallow theories which some people are pleased to expound about marriage. It is profaning the name of love to talk about it in such manner. If you want to make your own life bearable, you will say that it was not my fault, but *you* did not like me. Is it because I have neither father nor mother that I have been placed in such a cruel dilemma? Do you know that my aunt, on her death-bed, made me promise to do my utmost for the little one whom she left behind her? I have never regretted my promise, and I am trying to keep it now. I would lay down my life for that little Dorothy, and even for my uncle. It must not be said that *I* refused you, and deprived them of your money. But what I ask is perfectly simple. I throw myself on your generosity. I have adopted the only means of dealing with you in earnest. If I say that I was ready enough to accept you, and you were

disenchanted with me, and yet promised to do something for my little cousin, you will be helping me amazingly. I see you are surprised,' she added, pressing both her hands on her now burning cheeks, 'but that is because you know me so little. Could I refuse to help my uncle in his present strait? But I owe something to my womanhood. I give my relations their due, neither more nor less. It would be hard on my uncle to say that I act in this way by compulsion. I suppose it is necessity—but the necessity is no more likely to be agreeable to you than to me.'

He bent his head, and she continued, rapidly,

'If I were a man, I might persuade myself I was performing a chivalrous act in conferring, rather than receiving, a favour. My happiness may be safer in your keeping than in my own —that seems to be an idea to which other people have made up their minds. But—but both of us know how many wretched marriages there are in the world, and that a happy one is scarcely likely to be made in this way. I will not believe that you have anything to do

with a fresh sting, and, conquering her indications of weakness, she continued,

'No; I make no pretence to be what I am not. There is apparently no room in my life for romance. But I hate the cold, shallow theories which some people are pleased to expound about marriage. It is profaning the name of love to talk about it in such manner. If you want to make your own life bearable, you will say that it was not my fault, but *you* did not like me. Is it because I have neither father nor mother that I have been placed in such a cruel dilemma? Do you know that my aunt, on her death-bed, made me promise to do my utmost for the little one whom she left behind her? I have never regretted my promise, and I am trying to keep it now. I would lay down my life for that little Dorothy, and even for my uncle. It must not be said that *I* refused you, and deprived them of your money. But what I ask is perfectly simple. I throw myself on your generosity. I have adopted the only means of dealing with you in earnest. If I say that I was ready enough to accept you, and you were

disenchanted with me, and yet promised to do something for my little cousin, you will be helping me amazingly. I see you are surprised,' she added, pressing both her hands on her now burning cheeks, 'but that is because you know me so little. Could I refuse to help my uncle in his present strait? But I owe something to my womanhood. I give my relations their due, neither more nor less. It would be hard on my uncle to say that I act in this way by compulsion. I suppose it is necessity—but the necessity is no more likely to be agreeable to you than to me.'

He bent his head, and she continued, rapidly,

'If I were a man, I might persuade myself I was performing a chivalrous act in conferring, rather than receiving, a favour. My happiness may be safer in your keeping than in my own —that seems to be an idea to which other people have made up their minds. But—but both of us know how many wretched marriages there are in the world, and that a happy one is scarcely likely to be made in this way. I will not believe that you have anything to do

with such a bargain; you could never be so petty, so ungenerous.'

He had no time to think how shortsighted were the people who had placed a high-spirited girl in such a position, but as he looked at her flashing eyes, feeling as if he were unable to move his tongue, or even to unclench his teeth, he was too confused to be aware that his continued silence was a tacit admission of her impeachment.

The silence irritated and perhaps disappointed her. It maddened her to recollect that, when she had not intended to be surprised into any sort of confidence, her weakness had, after all, mastered her, and that she might even have seemed to be making a parade of her opinions for nothing. She cared less of what he thought of her, and made less attempt to check the headlong impulse which was so unusual with her, but which was still hurrying her into this passionate speech.

'Ah! perhaps you are weighing the advantages and disadvantages of the match. You are learned, you have had a university train-

ing,' she continued, in the same barbed words which he had found so difficult to answer—'pity you cannot turn it into a mathematical problem. You see, it has nothing to do with *feelings*—you must view it in the abstract. There are lots of people like that, they say, in the world, closely bound together, without——'

Her voice broke down at last, for there was something in his face which reminded her that she might lose her self-respect in talking thus wildly. Already the sickening feeling that this wild talk would be a haunting, tantalising recollection in after years was beginning to be a sharp pain from which it was impossible to escape.

In five minutes it would all be over, and although she knew that the hard-fought victory would be won, and had felt that she did not lose an inch of the ground, the reaction had already come, and she felt as if she could be almost thankful if he were to assert himself, and show some spirit on his side.

He roused himself at last from his monotonous silence, and from that tendency to stam-

mering slowness in expressing himself which had always been his bane when he had been indignant with other men for illiberal condemnation of opinions which did not happen to tally with their own.

Charles Lamb himself could not have stuttered more than Godfrey did as he answered, with an effort,

'I—s-s-suppose you k-know there is a sort of r-r-risk in this. If—I—I were to t-take you at your w-word?'

'You could not do it. You would be *miserable*,' she answered, quickly, for there was that in his face which prevented her from being the least alarmed, and which made her look back upon her own speeches, and wish she had had the subtlety to treat the whole thing with a lighter touch. 'I know you think in your heart that a marriage would be *terrible* founded on this sickening consideration for money advantages. I could wish for your own sake you had not the money—you, who used to talk so generously and benevolently, and for whose future one might have prophesied *such* great

things! Oh!'—looking him again in the face, and thankful for the opportunity of putting herself a little on one side—'I thought, when I made up my mind to speak to you the other day, that I might reckon on your sympathy, your active help, that what the poor people round us were suffering would have been of more importance to you than any personal advantage. But I—I have diligently inquired. I have tried to do you justice, and I find that the little money you have doled out to these poor dependents of ours is a mere drop in the bucket, and that no benevolent plans for helping them to help themselves, such as you talked of at Oxford, are to be carried out.'

He made a deprecating movement with his hand, but she continued,

'Ah! yes, I understand; you are to be helpless in all this. Crying evils are to go unremedied, because you are a sleeping partner, or no partner at all, in these injustices, and meanwhile the profits are to come to you, and'—lowering her voice and covering her face again —'to—*me*.'

He bowed his head; he could speak now without stammering, for he was more angry than he had been at all.

'I will not stoop to justify myself,' he said, coldly, 'or I might have troubled you to hear my side of the matter. You talk of these things as if they were new to me, and, after all, it strikes me as somewhat grotesque to remember that no man at Oxford railed more against "Midas-eared Mammon," or talked of the enfranchisement of the masses from the reign of squalor and misery, than I did; but—it has pleased you to ignore my side of the question.'

'It is precisely because I do not ignore it—that I think action is better than talk, and that when you came home I thought it would be all so different,' she began to explain, a little despairingly.

But it seemed as if he did not hear her; it was as if the ringing in his ears and the thick beating of his heart had made him a little deaf.

'There is only one comfort in all this,' he

said, a little slowly, 'that you have opened my eyes to another mistake. You have done your best to make me go from here—heartwhole.'

He raised his hat and was leaving her.

She had accomplished her purpose. The part had been played well; the game was won. And yet what inconsistent change had taken place in her heart, that she was beginning to think of the whole episode as an unhappy fatality? Why should there be tears of wounded feeling in her eyes, and why should she suddenly wish to spoil all the effectiveness of what she had already said, by what seemed to her might be an explanation of her strange behaviour, but which after all could only amount to hysterical re-iteration.

'You are an enigma to me—as great an enigma as your father,' she said, in a voice which sounded as if a little more would make her cry. 'But I should like you thoroughly to understand *me*. I admit that I thought well of you from what I heard of you before you came, and I have been perhaps wrong to put a bad construction on what is a

puzzle to me; but that you should have talked to *others* as if you were ready to stretch out a hand for help to your fellow-men, and now—now when you have an opportunity—show no resolute desire to do your best—it is—odd—you must admit. And,' with a sort of thrill of pain shaking her, 'that you should insult me in this way is more of a strange disappointment. I try not to mind, for as a woman I represent women—and,' with her hands fidgetting with the fastenings of her cloak in a wandering, uncertain way, 'and—it *may* have been thoughtlessness on your part—or ignorance of how we women may feel. If so, I am sorry for being unguarded in my language; but as a man of—of—honour, you must see that the part you have been playing here is a part likely to pain any woman. The brigand who demands a man's life or his purse at least allows him the liberty of choice. And you—what liberty was left for me or for yourself in a bargain like this? *You* were to be drawn into this calculating scheme, to be sacrificed whether you liked it or not?'

Agitated as he was, he tried to make a sign of smiling dissent.

But the growing anguish in her voice seemed to deepen the gulf between them, as she continued,

'Men mistake sometimes—they pay too much for a horse or a dog. How much more likely are they to be mistaken in a woman. I am trying to think what could have led you to entertain such ideas about me. If I were good-looking it might be different—my hair might be worth so much, and my smile so much. It is not so long since they used to put quadroons up for auction in India. The sale could have nothing to do with their hearts, that could be no part of the bargain. Oh, forgive me. I am proud of my birth, proud of the blood which flows in my veins, but if I had had a negro mother I would have killed myself rather than be turned into merchandise.'

She no longer made an effort to hide the gathering tears, as she stretched out her hands and said,

'I believed in your kind words, your chival-

rous conduct towards women, your sympathy for our troubles, your readiness to help us. I liked to believe in it; but now it seems it was all—a—a mistake. I ought to have made myself more agreeable to you. I know if I had done my duty I should have done so, instead of staking all my hopes on the certainty of your refusal. If you could have had the title, for instance, there might have been something for you to gain. But oh, I have heard so much about marriages in which there was no congeniality of thoughts and tastes. Think of two people living under the same roof, unable to accommodate themselves to each other, and too often with private disagreements. Can you imagine any greater misery? And what blessing could there be upon our marriage if we were to commence in a way like this. I did not mean to make you angry. I was thinking of you as well as myself. And I was sure you would see as plainly as I do that it could not be.'

He knew not which had been the hardest to bear, the impetuous rush of words which had

been so little like her usual calmness, and which had seemed to beat upon him like a storm of shot and shell, or the low voice which was diffident and trembling, but just as determined. During the long compulsory silence he had more than once told himself that this was one of those deep-natured women who are seldom openly stirred by strong emotion and who rarely assert themselves, but who, when they do, display a fixity of purpose and a strength of will sufficient to sweep away any amount of gainsaying.

'I meant to have shown better tact, but I have failed most dreadfully. I should make a very bad diplomatist,' she continued, conquering her emotion, and looking at him without flinching.

Had he been less confused he would have taken advantage of the undefinable something in her manner, which showed that she was anxious to prolong the interview. He might have lost his opportunity. He thought so long afterwards, when he remembered how, instead of answering her at once, he stood staring at her

dumbly, feeling as if the seal were still set on his lips, and as if he had not yet recovered his senses sufficiently to answer her. Could he expect to understand all at once the innermost sanctuary of a woman's heart?

'I do not blame you,' he said, after a pause during which she noticed that he was powerfully moved, 'you have scarcely given me time to realise the situation. But I think, if you allow me to say so, that you are not free from the invincible pride for which perhaps you are not responsible. It is one of the vices of your rank. Had you not been so hard on me, I might have cleared myself. But your words struck me. A thunderbolt could not have surprised me more. If you allow me to speak now I swear to you that, if I was not absolutely ignorant of all that you mention, I was at least concerned in no conspiracy.'

He could say no more. For a man of refined instincts to be reminded by a woman that he had allowed himself to tamper with her finer feelings, and to be drawn into an arrangement of this sort, was unbearable. He ought to have

been able to falter and equivocate. He should have been dignified and subtle, ready to suggest excuses for himself, but he had quailed, as if he were the weaker of the two in the emergency, and *now!* he could only bear the burden of his indecision and embarrassment.

A pang of humiliation, a sense of physical pain of which he was ashamed as of a weakness, could not be entirely hidden. For the hand which he stretched out to her visibly shook.

'Good-bye,' he said, 'you were afraid of a *mésalliance*, you need be afraid no longer. Your pride would not allow you to brook the idea of owing anything to a husband of plebeian blood. And—and you are too frank by nature to keep up a permanent reticence about anything.'

'No, no, you are mistaken,' she cried, in horror at the idea.

But it was too late for him to listen to her. He tried to think of her in much the same way in which he would have thought of a far-off star predestined to an orbit in which he could not move. He had hesitated about asking,

'Do you think I could be of any assistance to you as a sort of elder brother? I am very much at your service. Sons cannot always dictate to fathers, but I flatter myself I have a fair amount of influence with mine.'

But on second thoughts he dismissed the idea of making any further advance as absurd. And she too was conscious of that strange revulsion of feeling which, when he had gone, made her strain her eyes to look after him. There were tears still in her eyes, which she was forced to brush away, as they blinded her sight. Her sense of injury ought to have been soothed, but his last words had distressed her singularly.

'It is all over now. I have set up a barrier between us which nothing can remove. Perhaps it was madness,' she said to herself. 'But we never could have been happy *in that way*. It was best to end it so; but oh—if he should think me forward and unmaidenly.'

CHAPTER IV.

As Godfrey left the shrubbery and returned to his house, he felt exasperated with what he called his own weakness. He acknowledged that he had been hard hit; he who had never yet been seriously crossed in anything. It was as if his nerves still thrilled with the effort of longing to speak and defend himself, and of being unable to tell out the longing concealed in his heart. He knew that he had answered stupidly, and felt as if he must have looked like a dumb and ridiculous dupe. She had made a direct appeal to his manliness and sense of right, and his tongue had been tied, owing to the double embarrassment of feeling that there was a modicum of truth in

the charges which she brought against him, and the impossibility of explaining how little he was to blame. He was worsted, discomfited, routed. The whole scene had been incongruous, and he felt shaken by it—so shaken that he had to steady his steps. His arteries throbbed, his temples were burning, and he felt as if he would like to rest his aching head on the wet grass.

It would have been possible, if he had wished to attempt self-exculpation. It would have been easy even now to moralise flippantly about the impulsiveness and injustice of women. But as his thoughts travelled quickly over the history of the past, and as he tried to consider the matter in a perfectly impartial spirit, it was more natural to him to see his own shortcomings with a cruel distinctness. For his was one of those dispositions which are ever painfully alive to their own deficiencies. And the girl's words still stung him, as if she had poison under her lips. For a moment he tried to assume his father's cynicism, and to congratulate himself on his escape from a

woman who was as formidable as this. But the remembrance of the blue eyes, with tears hanging on their lashes, and the quivering lips, made this impossible. Yet it had been 'hard lines' for him, 'cruelly hard lines,' he repeated to himself. How could he have allowed himself to be placed in a position in which such a woman could turn on him? He had been conscious of standing before her like a simpleton, with no word to say for himself. But, if the whole thing were to come over again, he would be just as dumb with wounded pride, and with nothing to sweeten the bitterness of his mortification. For all the instincts with which he honoured womanhood had arrayed themselves on Vere's side, when she had stripped his father's motives bare, and made him acknowledge himself a culprit.

'How direct and good she is,' he said to himself, 'in spite of her anger—there was something noble even in that anger. And I—I to place her in such a vexatious, disagreeable situation! A sorry and contemptible figure I must have cut,' he added, with a laugh at his

own expense, 'as I stood before her, morally detected, mentally stunned, and could only beat a most cowardly retreat.'

All emotion is, as George Eliot says, 'obstinately irrational,' and it would have been useless to argue with him in his present humour, or to make him see, as Vere was beginning to see painfully already, that excessive feeling, like ambition, may at times 'o'erleap itself, and fall on t'other side.' In real life it often happens there is an irresistibly comic element, never intended by the actors, in tragedy itself; and the girl, who had a keen sense of humour, was already taking herself to task for her absurdity.

'It would not have happened, but for this wretched money. I wish I were out of it,' he said again to himself. It had long been an annoyance to him that he had never been able to get a clear account from his father as to how this money had been made. The consequences of its possession, when there was a mystery connected with it, had long disturbed his slumbers and hindered his peace. He

determined that it should be so no longer.

'Are ye so absent that ye can't see straight before ye?' asked Reuben, who met him as he went towards the house, finding it somewhat difficult to steady his steps.

The father had almost uttered one of his guttural exclamations, which were apt to sound like a stifled curse, as he saw his son's excited face. There was no embarrassment or hang-dog look in it, but something which he found it difficult to understand.

'What has happened to my dreamer? you come like a thunderstorm. We ought to strike up, "See the Conquering Hero comes."'

'What conqueror?' asked Godfrey, feeling as if hammers were still beating on his brain, and struggling in vain to assume an indifferent manner. 'Don't you think that about the "conquering hero" is a trifle hackneyed?'

He was ashamed of his rudeness directly he had uttered the words. But Reuben was not thin-skinned. He contented himself with vague and facetious allusions by which he tried to hide his evident anxiety.

The tone of his voice was a trifle hoarse as he said,

'Pluck up heart, my boy, you seem to be cast down. Faint heart never won fair lady.'

'You may spare yourself the trouble of alluding to the subject,' murmured Godfrey, in a low voice, 'I only regret taking advantage of Miss Rashleigh's painful position. I was unskilful in my wooing. I do not deplore it.'

The veins on Reuben's forehead stood out in strange relief—the colour on his cheeks became too deep and too blue.

'Do me the honour to repeat that.'

There was an ominous pause. The young man resented the bullying tone. The blood leaped to his usually pale face, and for a few moments he held in check a fiercer heat than he had ever felt before in his life. Then the tussle was over. He got his temper sufficiently under his command to say again, in a low voice,

'I only regret taking advantage of Miss Rashleigh's defenceless position. I have completely

failed, and the failure is not to be deplored.'

The pause had given Reuben time to see that he had made a mistake, and he said, in a jaunty tone,

'Why, you are precious easy discouraged, seems to me. You don't expect a gal to jump down your throat without the asking?'

'No, we have spoken together on the subject.'

'And the minx refused you,' cried Reuben, dashing his hand with fury on the table.

'She had too much good taste to refuse point-blank.'

'What did she say?'

'That she was the victim of a conspiracy, and if she consented to marry me under such circumstances, it would not be for my own sake, but only on account of her relations, and the—money.'

'Well, that's one for her—she scored a point there. She has sense enough to see that money is the great force which turns this world's clappers.'

'Oblige me by not bringing her name any

more into the conversation,' answered Godfrey.

But the man's passion would have its way.

'D—ce take the women,' he muttered, beneath his breath. 'A cantankerous, ill-made, thin-skinned, mawkish, mulish sex. One can only tolerate their existence because the world would stand still without 'em.' Godfrey drew himself up to his full height. But, seeing the expression in his son's face, the elder man tried to laugh good-humouredly. 'I tell ye that beggars can't be choosers. She ought to be thankful enough to marry ye.'

Godfrey controlled himself again. He knew that his father was not of his world, nor could comprehend his chivalrous respect for womanhood. Yet his voice vibrated strangely, and jarred on his father as he tried to explain.

'If I could have one of those dazzling birds of Paradise which I used to admire when I was a child,' he answered, still speaking deliberately, as if he had learnt from Vere her tone of assumed calmness, 'to perch on my shoulder or nestle in my hand, I might thank you for the present. But do you think I should care to deprive it of its liberty, to see

it sitting mopingly on its perch as quietly as if it were stuffed and stuck up in a glass case, or wild, and battering its poor wings against the bars of its cage? Let it come to me of its free will, or not at all.'

'That may be all very well for *you*. A chap given to sentiment, with eyes which look for all the world as if he's a-seeing visions when he had ought to be wide awake,' retorted Reuben, with his words readier than usual, but relapsing into the vernacular in his violent irritation, and speaking half as if to himself. 'A thing that might have been brought to a splendid end, frustrated, spoilt, because two children pout. Because,' he continued, as if he were quoting, 'the boy dislikes "the favour of the girl," and loves some doll instead—and the girl—— Heaven grant me patience!'

'I do *not* dislike the lady in question. Miss Rashleigh is irreproachable, and I cannot have her spoken of in that light way. She was naturally angry with me for proposing a mysterious *rendezvous*; she divined the meaning of it, and treated me as I deserved.'

'You were a namby-pamby fool.'

'I agree with you—I was a fool to be drawn into such a project. I think that Miss Rashleigh reasoned soundly—more soundly than the persons who drove her to speak out.'

'Hold your tongue, simpleton!' shouted Reuben, fairly beside himself with rage.

'You must let me have my say. I repeat she is right. I could not give her the reparation she required. I could not tell her the accusations were untrue. She might have loved me, had not her mind been prejudiced against me by this absurd project. But, as it is, you have opened an abyss between us.'

'Truly, you must have milk in your veins instead o' blood,' said the older man, with another scornful glance, 'and she as proud as Lucifer!'

'Who can wonder that she is proud? She comes of a race in which pride is considered to be a virtue. She is possessed of that sort of innocence and candour one generally associates with superhuman beings; but she is courageous besides. I do not think the less of her for her remarkable firmness of character. She did

not address to me one word which was too bitter, considering the circumstances which were likely to turn her heart against me.'

A new sort of fear occurred to the father, especially when Godfrey added,

'Let me alone; it is not myself that I care about—it is because a woman has suffered, and that woman, if you care to hear it, I love dearly as my own life. Under other circumstances, we might have been happy together, and now I could only leave her with a sensation of shame.'

'Don't expect me to care about the ins-and-outs of your love affairs,' said Reuben, beginning to be a little more alarmed. 'There's more fish in the sea yet. We'll show her that there are others as well worth the having. It's right that you should marry, and that little girl Dorothy will grow up prettier by half than her cousin. And I can answer for *her* accepting ye. I'll have no more half-measures about this here estate.'

Reuben's grammar was becoming wild, but his son's face remained impenetrable.

'You try my sense of duty too far,' he muttered, between his teeth.

His father did not hear him. He continued,

'This'll tame the shrew. Though, when I think on't, if you'd urged her—spoke to her more lover-like——'

'I told you I would not allow her name to be brought into the conversation.'

The low, concentrated voice was not to be set at nought, and Reuben said, more gently,

'But the other maid.'

'The idea is monstrous. Before I consented, on this last occasion, to make love to any lady according to your primitive notions, I ought to have been pretty sure that her wishes lay in the same direction. This infatuated pursuit of her was, to say the least of it, undesirable. But I absolutely repudiate any idea of repeating the mistake. I will have nothing to do with such a lunatic bargain. Good God—does it need saying?—I would rather eat the dust off my shoes!'

And Reuben, looking at him, saw that the lad's face was as white as the face of a corpse.

The strange, self-reliant man who had borne every vicissitude of hunger, fatigue, endurance, and self-denial for thirty-three years—always with a view to the accomplishment of a wild purpose—was almost ready to hate himself at that moment. In his son's apparent weakness lay his strength against him.

He approached Godfrey with a curious tenderness, placing his arm so as to support him. But the lad motioned him away with a movement almost like disgust.

'No, I can walk quite well,' he said, turning instinctively in his agitation towards the shadier plantation. 'You talked to me once before,' he muttered, as soon as he could command his voice, 'about bringing Sir Ralph on his "marrowbones" before you. Why do you bear these Rashleighs such a grudge?'

Then for the first time he heard his father's tale.

'A grudge! If to bear a grudge was to wish as he had wished for years to see another man humiliated and stamped on as he had been stamped himself with the marks of degradation!'

Reuben laughed aloud. He could not have told why he laughed, unless it was at the incredible irony of Fate. To have spoilt his own life in the mad fury of his desire for vengeance, and every time to be foiled—so as to feel sick and ashamed of his deeply-nursed revenge—to be opposed by his own son on the second occasion when the time for his reckoning seemed to have come, and when he was near the achievement of a purpose which he had cherished for so many weary years! It made him laugh like a madman. It was something to be able to pride himself on the steady working-out of his own will, and to witness the fulfilment of a curse which had turned the human kindness in his heart to gall. But somehow the Fates had been against him, and the curse was scarcely so pleasant in its fulfilment as he had expected.

It is the unexpected (as Disraeli said) which always happens. And once before at the very moment when Reuben was holding the trump card—after a series of almost unprecedented successes, following years of treadmill

work—it had been dashed out of his hand. Was it accident, or was it some spiritual agency outside his fell purpose, which had so ordered it that on the very day when—fearful of revealing himself for an instant to his simple countrymen—Reuben was driving to take possession of the property which he had purchased, the man whom he had intended to see writhe under his threats was struck by the hand of death which disarmed his human arm. There had been a feeling akin to murder in the heart of the self-made man who had returned triumphant. He had intended his enemy to sue to him for mercy, and to acknowledge the bitterness of a thrust which he could entrust to no deputy. He had reminded himself, when Sir George was dead, that into his deeply-laid plan of revenge there had entered no question of personal violence. He had simply intended to poison the baronet's life for him, just as his own life had been early poisoned by the injustice to which he had imagined Sir George had subjected him. He had meant to humiliate him through bitter experiences of poverty; he had intended to grind

down by slow degrees that tormenter of his boyhood, the remembrance of whom had been a thorn in his side all his life—a shadow in his path. But he was just too late.

He tried to explain something of this to his son.

'I had not forgotten. It was impossible for me to forget. I bear the marks of his cruelty still.'

He repeated this almost mechanically; he had repeated it so often before. But somehow the old argument did not avail when Sir George was dead. The difficulty which had made it impossible for Reuben to accept a religion which said to him 'forgive,' seemed somewhat to have melted away. He began to perceive that the revenge which he had nursed was out of all proportion to the offence supposed to have been committed. He had prided himself on not being superstitious, but he certainly was uncomfortable when old Sir George's funeral had filed past his house, for it seemed as if his desire for vengeance had been anticipated in rather a ghastly way.

Under any circumstances, it is a curious experience to come back to a place which you have photographed in your memory for years, to find the place itself and the whole train of associations connected with it—utterly changed. If the memory of it has been like an old tune breaking unpleasantly on your present associations, and if the mood in which you left the spot has been an evil one haunting you, and pre-occupying you to the detriment of better things, the best way to destroy the disagreeable illusion is to go back, and see it with the matter-of-fact, work-a-day eyes which may help you to sweep away the unhealthy fabric of the dream at once.

But if at the same time there has been one of those strange coincidences which so constantly occur in life—a coincidence difficult to dismiss from the mind, as one of those mere accidents which are supposed to have nothing to do with an over-ruling Providence—a coincidence, moreover, which arrests you in a purpose, stands in your path in an obstinate fashion, like Balaam's ass—you will be apt to

feel at the same time a little staggered and ashamed.

I suppose each of us might imagine a mental agony which we might define, according to our several temperaments, as the greatest imaginable unhappiness in life. But could anything surpass the pang of a martyr chained to a stake, and realising just as the flames were lit that the purpose for which he was to suffer was, after all, a mistaken one? It was with a feeling akin to this that Reuben, who had spent years of painful deprivation in order that an old man might feel the anguish of mental blows as poignantly as he himself had felt the physical blows—the marks of which he bore yet—had acknowledged that the triumph had been taken from him, and that there was little of the expected aroma of vengeance in reflecting that Sir George's sins might be visited on his children.

After all, the reckoning had to be with Sir Ralph, and the sight of Sir Ralph's niece had suggested a project as ambitious, but more benevolent, to Reuben's busy brain. Sir Ralph

was not the man who had wronged him; the son could not be responsible for the father's mistakes. And Reuben, who had one tender place in his heart, shrank from aiming blows that might threaten other interests which were dear to him. He told himself that he was human, and that there might be, after all, some truth in the teaching of the parsons. In his own case, he had felt as if he could never respond again to human weaknesses, except in the matter of his only son. All women, from his point of view, were but toys. He had never thought of his own wife as different from the rest of them, But when Godfrey had been born—a new kind of child, with a love for flowery lanes and green fields—a child of a romantic habit of mind, who passed his time in dreams and imaginative reveries—he regarded him with tenderness, mixed with a modicum of contempt.

The idea of righting himself from injury was as strong as ever, but it had assumed another form. If he had had no other interest, no concern in the world but himself, it might still

have taken the form of hatred. It would have been easy then, but *now* he could no longer persuade himself that all the love in his nature had turned to gall. His triumph might be used to humiliate Sir Ralph, and at the same time to spare him to a certain extent by raising Godfrey. Stubborn and unforgiving as Reuben was at heart, he was still a little tickled by the humorous idea that old Sir George's ghost —supposing it to be conscious of that which was taking place on this earth of ours—would be maddened at the thought that his grand-daughter had been forced to marry the son of that thief whom he had caused to be flogged and imprisoned.

Reuben had wished the old baronet to 'die a dog's death,' and his conscience was sometimes troubled by the remembrance of this wish. But there would be a sort of poetic justice in the other finale. He had several times rehearsed the scene in which he intended to disclose his origin to Sir Ralph, as soon as the marriage had irrevocably taken place. He would like to see the expression on the proud man's

face when he heard that his niece had married the son of a gaol-bird. But Godfrey's fastidious scruples had ruined the well-laid plan.

CHAPTER V.

THERE was silence when Reuben finished his tale, which had been told by degrees in abrupt, jerky sentences, in the plain, incisive English of which the man had a fair command, though he did not always speak it with grammatical correctness. Both men, by common consent, had seated themselves on a rustic bench, and the elder one did not look at his son when he had finished, but settled himself again on the bench from which he had risen in the excitement of the narrative, dropping his arms by his side, while that part of his face which was not covered by the beard assumed again the hard rigidity which for a time had relaxed.

He was waiting his son's answer with an

intensity of expectation. If he did not expect applause, he had counted on his sympathy. But the heart-drawn sigh of the younger man was certainly not encouraging. Godfrey, indeed, was stunned, and trying to think. He had heard the tragic tale with his outward ears, but his inward senses had refused to take it in. Waves seemed to be passing over his mind in which his intelligence was submerged. The bitterness of his father's speech had been as painful for him to listen to, as his excitement had been painful to witness.

Reuben's eyes had been wild and troubled as he told the story, and his hands had trembled like those of a drunken man. It was a strange, unnatural story for a man of Godfrey's refined instincts and cultivated tastes to hear. Yet Reuben was his father still; and, if he had nursed his revenge beyond the ordinary course of nature, somehow he had conquered it at last. His success in life had probably been owing to it. In Reuben's case, the generalisation of 'La Bruyère' with regard to love had only been exemplified in another way. Hatred and venge-

ance had led to ambition, but Godfrey—as soon as his thoughts became clearer—had a hope that in his father's case ambition would never be likely to return again to the meaner passion which had inspired it. Reuben had tried to keep the passion up; but more than thirty years was too long a time, and for want of fuel it had died.

'Thank you for telling me. You were treated abominably. But the time which has passed should wipe out the score,' said the younger man, after a painful pause.

'And yet you sit there and refuse to help me!'

'I haven't it in my power,' answered the other man, slowly. 'If I had, would you wish me to take part in a wrong? Sir Ralph's niece had nothing to do with it—nor Sir Ralph himself. Don't think me unkind, but I confess, if I had heard all this before, it would have made it more difficult than ever for me to address Miss Rashleigh.'

'As how?'

Godfrey could not answer, but muttered something about its being more difficult than

ever, in case of his parentage becoming known. He himself would think none the less of his parentage, and he was careful, even in trying to explain himself, to hide how great a shock it had been to him to hear of his father's irregular birth.

'It is hard to make you understand,' he said, a little feverishly. 'It is well for you to have told me all this story—there ought to be nothing hidden between us; but it might—it might be an impediment to——'

'You tell me this to my face!'

'Why not? I can understand how the cruelty practised on you in your childhood may have haunted you in the way which you describe. It is horrible to think of you passing through the years, unloved and misunderstood, with a nightmare like this driving you almost to madness. But the thing is past. Would you have me bind a curse like this up with my life? Should a marriage have anything to do with revenge?'

He could hear his father's hard breathing in the second pause which ensued. The two

characters were so utterly different that it was difficult for Godfrey to understand how any injury could so have eaten into a naturally loving heart, as to make Reuben go on his unforgiving way week after week, month after month, year after year. In this world of death, where there are so many sorrows to be healed—so many wounds to be bound up, so much suffering to be hidden—it seemed almost beyond the bounds of possibility that a man could deliberately have gone on creating a worse horror—a hell for himself shut out from the sweet light of heaven. Self-mutilation of this kind, lopping away all the joyousness and real happiness of life—condemning oneself to the outer darkness while the wedding-feast was going on and the door not shut, was incomprehensible from any point of view in which the younger man could look at it.

He was sorry, but he would keep his own soul unspotted. He had his own honour to think of; he needed a quiet brain—to be still and think.

Then Reuben's voice broke forth again in angry protest, and, as he looked contemptuously at his son, he cried,

'I compliment 'ye on your womanish weakness, yer mean-spirited cowardice. But unfortunately I can't take yer advice. The family has made me suffer, and it's right as the family should suffer in its turn. I don't credit Sir Ralph with fine feelings, but I compliment you on yours.'

'Thank you,' murmured his son, suddenly chilled.

'The moment has struck when I shall be able to pay the family in good coin for the turn it did me. No audacity on the part of a gal shall stop me, and I think I may add, no audacity on the part of my own boy.'

'I think it is your duty to do all you can to repair the mischief from which you suffered—no such cruelties are practised in our time—but not to make the innocent suffer.'

'*My duty!* I tell you what, young man,' answered Reuben, buttoning his coat, while he tried in vain to keep his blood cool, 'you

altogether forget yerself in the way you allow yerself to speak to me. They may well say that nowadays children dictate to parents, and parents obey children. But this is question of right and justice. I've bought the property, I can do what I like wi' it.'

'It is not a question of justice, but of pure humanity. You bring this accusation against the grandfather, and it rebounds upon the granddaughter—a helpless girl of twenty whose dignity is injured.'

'Ah—h!' answered Reuben, with the guttural sound in his throat which jarred disagreeably on Godfrey's nerves, 'there's the explanation of all this palaver, you think a deal more of this fine lady than you do of me.'

'If you mean that I love her, you are right; and yet I don't wish, under present circumstances, to marry her. You can't strike her without striking me?'

Reuben smiled ironically.

'My boy, you don't know me. If I've once said as a thing can be done, no tall talk o' this sort can shake me.'

'If a blow is to be dealt, it should be at once,' he said to himself. 'Short and sharp, that's my way.'

Godfrey did not answer, though he rose to go. He wished he did not know a secret which he must not be so rash as to tell, but which haunted him as if the very air could tell it.

CHAPTER VI.

GODFREY, who slept but little that night, was up as soon as the day began to dawn. It was almost instinctively that he bent his steps to the old burial ground at Torringmoor which his father had described. It had been too late to put a headstone over the undistinguishable grave of the woman who had done her best to influence the waif for good. But Godfrey noticed that the weeds which grew rankly in other parts of the graveyard had been cleared in the corner where all that was earthly of Mary Burton had been laid, and that a few flowers had been planted.

'There is more than one weak spot in his heart after all. It explains a great deal,' re-

flected the young man a little tenderly, as he put his hand within the rails and plucked a moon-daisy, 'and yet it will be better for us to part.'

His hot human protest, his determination to assert his will in this crisis, seemed somehow to be calmed by the recollection of the quiet sleepers for whom the love and hate, passion and madness of this life had passed away. They had been paupers, knowing not so much of the joy as of the sorrow of this world. Their hearts must have throbbed as his did once. Human tragedies must have been enacted by some of them. And yet—one could not think of them now in connection with pitiful heart-burnings and raging passions. He put the moon-daisy in his pocket-book, and returned —saying nothing of his long walk—to the breakfast-table.

He had made up his mind, and had said over and over to himself, in that quiet walk over the moor,

'Stay *here!*—to be ground down to a moral level which I have always scorned! To have

the life worried out of me, and to learn at last to despise myself—it is not to be thought of.'

All his wishes, which had long been curbed, were now turning towards a freer life—where the race was to the swift, and the battle to the strong. He did not over-estimate his own capacities, and yet he was conscious of a longing to measure himself with others, who might be better men than he. Anything rather than remain in this dull mediocrity. His last conversation with his father had been like the scattering of mists, revealing 'rocks ahead' which he had hitherto scarcely suspected.

The very thought of the money which he was to inherit was a torture to him. He had been right when he had told Vere that he had always despised it. The comforts with which he had been surrounded from his earliest boyhood came as naturally to him as the air he breathed, and it was difficult for him to form the slightest idea of what it might be for him to miss them. His father's treatment of the tenants had done much to arouse him, and Vere's allusion to the the way in which action in his own case seemed

to be divorced from duty had determined him more than ever to be no longer like a sleep-walker among drowsy men. It was no time for ease and comfort.

In his somewhat morbid state of self-reproach he thought that he could guess how Reuben had made his money, from the knowledge of how it was left to gather now like a cruel avalanche sweeping away everything helpless before it. He could not redeem the past by any self-sacrifice, but he was responsible for the present. The evils of which he was conscious around him seemed to him no longer for slow cure, but for rapid and slashing amputation of everything that offended.

His last conversation about the poor people had been utterly useless. He could not improve the cottages or interfere with the tenants without leave from his father. Further discussion on the subject had long ago threatened to become violent. Reuben had not advanced one step to meet his son in any of his benevolent projects. Godfrey was checkmated. He had heard that, since his father had bought up

nearly all the territory originally belonging to the Rashleigh family, the agent whom he employed had driven out many a peasant to starve or to betake himself and his wife and children to the Torringmoor workhouse. None of the accusations hinted at by Vere had been unfounded.

And so, at the first allusion to money—Reuben's favourite subject—the young man spoke out.

'I wish it did not belong to you, or that it was not to come to me,' was his passionate cry. 'It seems to me that this constant desire for money, *money, money*, must dwindle and wither all that is best in us. I honour you for your work, I honour you for your self-denial, but it may be better for me to labour as you did before me. Not for hoarding, not for saving, not for leaving a fortune before me when I die—for it seems to me that directly we begin to care about money for its own sake we are digging a ditch, or widening the breach which already exists between us and all that is best. The money becomes like a heavy weight keeping one

down to the slums of life. After all, what can it purchase but the poorest of food for the wants of'—he was going to say, 'our higher natures?' but he stopped short.

A humourist would have been tickled by the puzzled expression of Reuben's face, as his son tried to pull himself up and continued, with a sort of half-apology,

'I suppose I have something of the vagrant in my blood. You will think so if I confess that I dislike to be chained to a part of the world, to feel that here I must live, and have all my little amusements, and suffer and die and be buried. It makes me inclined to hate the place. In what sense do we really possess it. No man can *possess* any part of God's earth in such a sense as to keep his brethren from enjoying it. If he does, his selfishness is arrant. And if he lets the other men feast on it with their eyes, so that its beauty can sink into their hearts, and it becomes a part of their'—he was going to say 'individual consciousness,' but corrected it into plainer English—'their very selves, in a certain sense they possess it too.'

'Are you joking?' asked Reuben, leaning his elbows on the table and looking at him as he would have looked at some natural curiosity.

'No, I am in earnest. If I never talked to you in this way before, it was because I knew you would think me mad. But it is not madness. I am in sober earnest when I tell you that long ago, as long as when I first began to think, it seemed to me that what we call the "economic relations" of society are all rotten and confused. That one set of men should claim the land for themselves and others should be condemned to stifling workplaces with insufficient wages and pigstyes for houses, seemed to me something terrible. And what do we gain by it? When we are dead, both of us, these trees may be cut down, or the ground let into building leases. The water may go on sparkling as merrily as ever, or it may be blackened by manufactories. In either case, six feet of earth will serve us for our graves, and it will be of little consequence that we once had the temerity to call the place *ours*.'

Reuben's face looked only somewhat paler and more mask-like than usual, but the hands shook which he still rested on the table.

He was a Radical in so far that he would like to humble the pride of the aristocratic class of the human race; but he had nothing in common with the democrat who would relentlessly pull down the very heights which he had slaved to reach. There were certain distinctions of wealth which he considered to be binding upon the world at large, and the people who rebelled against them should, according to his creed, be treated as lunatics or criminals. To attempt to alter these distinctions by the slow processes of evolution, which were not in keeping with the ideas of vehement youth, would have been almost as abhorrent to him as Godfrey's denunciations. He himself was ready to fly out in imprecations and furious words, and his passion was almost aggravated by his attempts at self-control.

He got up and paced the room with heavy steps, the perspiration standing in beads on his forehead, and there was such a concentration of

wrath in his low, vehement voice when he murmured, 'What are ye driving at now?' that it cost the son a greater effort to answer than if he had been addressed in the roughest and coarsest tones.

The old tendency to stammering which, in the earlier part of his life, had prevented Godfrey from ever making an orator, with real success, and which had so effectually closed his lips when he would have done better to answer Vere, came upon him as he tried to reply, courteously yet firmly,

'I beg you to rid me of this wealth. Enjoy a part of it during your life-time, and after your death let it be divided amongst the people who need it most. My own belief is that, as the world goes on, the personal possession of large tracts of land will become a thing impossible. It will no longer give some few undue control over the happiness and industry of the majority. That moor, or even a part of it, is not yours. That we should fancy we are the sole possessors of even a part of it is inconsistent with the freedom and welfare of a large number of people hereabouts.'

He spoke hesitatingly, as if he were reciting a lesson, as in truth he was. He had repeated the words to himself previous to the interview, as if he were aware that his was one of those natures with impressionable nerves, which are likely to appear at their worst in a difficult emergency.

His keen sympathy for suffering of any kind, especially the inflicting of disappointment—hardest of all in the case of his own father—made it well that he had done so. For Reuben—who had been annoyed beyond expression on the previous night, and could not bring himself to believe that he was face to face with an obstacle which he had not strength to overcome—was now fairly dazed.

'Bosh!' he muttered, 'the lad is worried and queer.'

That the prize on which he had so certainly counted should be ready to escape him seemed incredible enough. But that his son should be losing his head!—— He began to think of medical nostrums, and determined to consult a doctor that very afternoon.

'I don't know how to make you see my side of the question without seeming to be priggish,' said Godfrey, in tones of apology.

He was perfectly well aware that his father must think he was endeavouring to bring down the existing structure of society, and he did not feel much like a vigorous Samson to make it totter to its foundations.

'Ridiculous humbug!' again growled Reuben, who had certainly no fancy for the re-distribution of the property which he had worked so hard to acquire.

How would it be possible for Godfrey to break to him the novel idea that he might distinguish himself by taking the part of a philanthropist, and be thankful for the opportunity of getting rid of his millions by sharing them, as a means of enjoyment, with the people? It would have taken generations to produce a man like Reuben, who could be properly grateful for the coming change. His son represented *himself*. All his hopes for the future had been centred in him.

The purple shade on his face grew darker

and deeper, as Godfrey tried to explain.

'You told me the story of your childhood last night—it was kind of you to do so—but you told me nothing of the means by which you made your wealth. Forgive me if I say that some sort of confidence of *that* kind is needed between a man and his heir—I do not say a father and a son, though one might suppose the confidence would be increased by ties of blood—but some lessening of reserve in most cases is necessary for the proper enjoyment of a property which has been acquired—in—in——'

'So you wish to make conditions before you accept what I have to offer ye? I call that a queer start,' said Reuben, irritated into vulgarity.

'And yet you, on your side, wish to make the inheritance of your fortune conditional on my marrying some lady whom you choose, though that condition may not be agreeable to the lady. You have a perfect right to do so,' he said, with an apparent calmness which Reuben felt to be still more irritating. 'No one can dispute your further right to reserve

to yourself the secret of how that fortune has been acquired. I should be impertinent to inquire into more than you have chosen to tell me. But, at any rate, I may withdraw from my share in arrangements of which I know nothing. Our opinions as to the management of such property are altogether different. My position was difficult from the first; I do not see any hope of its becoming easier. Your money can only be mine on conditions, and I foresee that fresh difficulties will constantly arise between us.'

'One might think you'd been rehearsing in a penny theatre,' sneered the angry father, as he continued,

'Some of these difficulties are conscientious ones to me, and a man cannot easily submit to conditions where his conscience is concerned. It is not merely your opinion about marriage, but your opinions about nearly everything are the opposite of mine. This is our misfortune—not our fault. Heaven grant that you may live to a good old age, but by that time I shall be a middle-aged man, forced for the best years

of my life to submit to spending money on my own luxuries—money which has been wrung from others by modes which——'

He was going to add 'which do not commend themselves to me,' but stopped himself in time.

Reuben muttered something about the infatuation of the lad, and his indifference to all the gold which had been lavished on him.

'There are plenty of philanthropic institutions which would be glad of it. Why not leave it to them?' Godfrey said, beneath his breath.

But, low as he spoke, the older man heard him. It was the final blow. All his plans were foiled. The dream of the projected marriage had collapsed like a soap bubble. Only in a heated moment had he let words fall about the history of his life which he now would have given much to recall. It was what Godfrey had said which had forced his secret from him. He regretted too late the moment of weakness, and said, in his loudest voice,

'Then if you are in earnest—if you prefer to make me miserable—to see me beggared in my

old age rather than remain and make me happy, you must go your own way. You would curse me wi' beggary, and in spite of all I have done for ye—you refuse to remain by me. Go, and be d—d.'

The ugly purple was deepening on Reuben's face, and he looked as if he would have liked to detain his son in the vice of his strong grip. Tragedies in real life are generally quiet. In this case as in others there was little more froth of words to betray the turmoil which was raging within the hearts of both men.

The same spasm of pain which had passed over the elder man's usually impassive face was repeated on the son's.

'Look here; I don't mean to be rude to you, father. I owe you a great deal. But we have had too much argument already on some of these matters. We shall never agree. Spare me your reproaches.'

The storm of passion in Reuben again tried to get to the front; but the evil words which he was ready to utter seemed to be strangled in his throat.

'I will not be cozened into——' he began, but could not finish his sentence.

Overborne by his son's unexpected energy, and his vain attempts to cow him into submission, he gazed at him for a few moments in stupefaction, and then broke into half-derisive laughter.

Godfrey fairly hid his face in his arms and groaned. The indelible recollection of that laughter haunted his memory afterwards. It was even a relief when Reuben regained his voice sufficiently to say,

'I wash my hands of ye; I cast ye off from this moment. Let me never hear your name again.'

'Perhaps it will be better,' said the younger man, trying to speak calmly. 'It is a solution of the difficulty which would have come badly from me; but, now that you suggest it yourself, it may be the only one for both of us. You tell me things with no permission to reveal them, and our way of looking at nearly everything is diametrically opposite. I have too long stifled my convictions, and dreamt the

dream of an epicurean. It is time for me to prefer labour to slothful indifference. It will be better for me to be independent of substantial aid. Do not think I am raving, and do not trouble yourself. I shall not bother you. I will leave so quietly that there shall be no scandal about it,' answered the younger man.

It was like a bad dream to him afterwards to remember his father's answer.

'Go and try to earn money, to be free from the burden of my charity. Go and get enough with your white hands, and fling it in my face.'

The words rang like thunder in Godfrey's ears, who had a sensation as if he had been in long confinement, when at last he reached the outer air.

In less than a couple of hours afterwards he was turning his back on Torringmoor. Still the echoes of that angry voice seemed to be ringing in his ears, 'Go and try, you simpleton; ye can do nothing for yourself,' as with a small portmanteau, containing all that he cared to take away of his worldly goods, he made his way across moor and lane. Long afterwards

he remembered the clucking of the hens in the poultry-yard, and that it was the time when the clematis began to run to seed, as his eye had been attracted by the appearance, like white foam, on some of the bushes—in spite of his dizziness. Voices were calling, and dogs barking from some of the gardens which he passed, and a girl lingered at the door of one of the houses, watching him with some curiosity. At Torringmoor he surrendered his portmanteau to a small boy, and quietly nodded to some of his friends as he took a third-class carriage to London.

He had always travelled first-class before; he thought it was a pity he had been so lapped in luxury. Unfortunately he had been brought up like a gentleman at leisure, and had led a useless, if a harmless, life.

'Well, it is never too late to mend—and to show that I can do something for myself,' he thought, trying to laugh at his own excessive feeling, which seemed to be out of all proportion to the change in his circumstances.

'It is only that I pitched my ideas too high;

but that would scarcely account for my being so terribly unstrung,' he said again, as he wiped the moisture from his brow, and knew that it was not only for his father's mortification, but for the woman whom he had left behind, for whom he was so distressed. 'Better, after all,' said the same inward voice, 'better that you should go away even for *her* sake. You will be a dozen times as strong to resist the temptation of falling into a plan of which you do not approve, and resisting temptation in her absence.'

'If I love her,' he repeated, 'should I wish to work her misery?'

The very argument made him realise that he was hoping one day to regain the affection which, he told himself, he had been so unfortunate as to lose by a blunder.

PART V.

My motto is—content with this ;
Gold, rank, I prize not such.
That which I have my measure is ;
Wise men desire not much.
Men wish and wish, and have their will,
And wish again as hungry still.

From Claudius.

CHAPTER I.

It cannot be said that Reuben Sellwood had any serious fear of the result of the angry conversation which had taken place between himself and his son. That Godfrey should leave his luxurious home as suddenly as a nomad leaves his encampment—who strikes his tent, and, when the morning comes, the place which had known him knows him no more—had never occurred to him as possible. It was true that Godfrey had shown a special aversion for the pageantry of wealth, but there could be no doubt that he enjoyed all the little comforts to be derived from unostentatious luxury. And in this respect Reuben had deferred to his son's taste. Reserved as he

was himself, he was not sorry to learn by degrees how essentially the details of an English patrician household of the nineteenth century differed from the somewhat more barbaric show of the century which had preceded it.

Godfrey had persuaded his father to dispense with unnecessary servants, to prefer swift and smooth-rolling carriages to the spectacle of gorgeous liveries, and simple meals perfectly served to more costly dinners. But these things, as he knew, were second-nature to his son. Delicately nurtured, and with the refined tastes of a woman, it did not seem to Reuben possible that his 'poet' could exist without the gold of Dives to minister to his tastes.

Consequently he whistled to himself more in amusement than in discomfort when it appeared that the young man had not occupied his bed on the night in question.

'He had taken a constitooshinal,' so Reuben pronounced it; 'it 'ud cool him, and bring him back to his right senses.'

But when he waited a week, and there came no message from his son, he began to think that Godfrey's ferment of opinion was unusually long in subsiding. Another week passed, and still no message or letter. Then it was that by degrees Reuben began to comprehend how the young man had taken him at his word, and how it was possible that Godfrey might, after all, have acted not from impulse, but from definite purpose.

Had Godfrey's nature been more superficial, or less easily wounded by that which seemed to him coarse interference with his own personal feelings, there might have been more hope for Reuben. He had insulted his son and bid him depart. Nothing could recall that son now.

After a week's interval, the expected note arrived. It bore no date and the post-mark proved to be misleading.

'If I had thought it possible,' Godfrey wrote, 'to say good-bye without rousing further ill-will, I would gladly have done so. I thank you for all your kindness in the past. Yeu were

right to take the opportunity of getting rid of me. I could no longer have satisfied you, or have fulfilled your wishes, and you would have taken umbrage every time that I ventured to declare my opinions. Even if I could have succeeded in generally stifling my thoughts, the situation would have been strained, and you would infallibly have tired of me. I could no longer find nourishment out of the narrow-necked bottles which you thought would be sufficient for me. It might have ended horribly.

'Fate has spared us both much misery in bringing matters to a climax so abruptly. If in any way I hurt your feelings I beg a thousand pardons. *Don't trouble about me.* Why should I be pitied even if I were to return to the people from whom you now have told me I have sprung? I have hands and can work. I have brains and can use them. I hope, when you think of it seriously, you will find nothing worthy of condemnation in the step which I have taken. Since I cannot recompense you in the way that you wish, nothing remains for me but to take you at your word, and relieve you of a

presence which has become wearisome to you. To renew the contest would be worse than useless. Silence, in a case like this, may be for our common interest. But, if I may ask one favour, I would say arrange everything with regard to money independently of me. *You* know the amount of your fortune; I neither know nor wish to know anything about it. But, if possible, I should like you to make the lady, whom you used so justly to admire, sufficiently independent to be able to continue to live in the house which belonged to her forefathers. Do not blame me for pleading *her* interests rather than my own. She and her little cousin have been brought up in a way likely to make privation exceedingly painful to them, and Sir Ralph's health is in a state which is far from satisfactory.'

The letter had been a rambling one and difficult to write, for how could he tell his father that, if that father had trusted his secrets to him before, he (Godfrey) would have refused to be made an accomplice in such folly.

But the following mysterious missive which

Vere Rashleigh received about the same time had been more difficult still to compose. Godfrey felt, in writing it, so much like the hero of a French melodrama, whose situation resembled his own, that he was abrupt rather than sentimental in composing it.

'Thank you for opening my eyes to see the ridiculous figure which I must have cut, not only in your sight, but in that of all other sensible men and women. Pardon me for having made you suffer. I will do my best to make amends, even though I do not feel yet as if I were equal to making a defence. To enter into a lengthy explanation, and to shift the burden on other shoulders than mine would do no good to either of us. I feel as if I have been guilty of a foolish act, and have brought fresh misfortune on one whom I love better than anyone else in the world. My only resource is to leave the place in which I ruined myself by my own imprudence, nor shall I venture to address you again at present. I have no cause for complaint.

'It is no hardship to break with the past, and

to set out as other men have done before me, with my little boat, alone into unexplored waters. Probably it matters nothing to you whether I sink or swim. To prevent the former catastrophe, I may hold on to some bit of wreckage, but in that case you will never hear of me. If, to take a more hopeful view, I can grapple with the current as other nobodies have done before me—if I can make a name or have something to offer you worthy of your consideration—I may again address myself to you in the future. Till then be kind, if it is not too much to ask from you, to my father. I leave him with some anxiety; and, if you can do something to help him from falling a victim to melancholy or cynicism, it will be such an act of kindness that I may perhaps take it as a token of forgiveness.'

He wrote this last letter from a boarding-house in a crowded part of London, intending to give it to a north-country woman, who was passing through town, to post. And, as he finished it, he dared not scrutinize it. Some instinct which he could not resist had prompted

him to write the two last sentences. And he knew that the one touch of nature might read like an impertinence. Was it vanity, or something which was naturally sanguine in his temperament—and which, in spite of his self-distrust, had kept him up more than once in his past life—that had led him to talk still of the possibility of making a name, when the chances were becoming less and less in his favour? He asked himself the question in self-mockery; for he no longer felt like one who had a mission to help his fellow-men. All enthusiasm to put straight the things that were out of joint in this world's economy, had been damped by the personal necessities which were already forcing themselves upon him.

The story is one often told. This device of coming to London was simply a manœuvre for losing himself. And the rate at which London was growing was so rapid that it made the young man hope he might easily elude all pursuit in it. A corner of a city in which speculative builders were beginning to calculate that sixty thousand fresh comers might require housing

every year, was the least likely place for a man who wished to hide himself to be easily found out.

Godfrey (he had determined to drop the name of Sellwood, but scorned to practise deception in the matter by assuming another surname) came to London, with a fair amount of money in his pocket, in the month of September, when the Parliamentary session had been for some little time over, when the usual exodus had emptied the great city of some of the more influential of its citizens, and when a man could walk the streets without being jostled or elbowed by his neighbours. But for this very reason, as he quickly realised, there was more fear of attracting notice than at other times.

At the great hotel at which he stopped for the first night, he remarked with a sort of alarm that guests were no longer kept waiting for their newspapers or their claret, and that they could eat their mutton cutlets in an atmosphere no longer so heated as to drive sanitary reformers wild. Out of doors, it was the same

metamorphosis. The cabmen had adopted a tone of most unwonted civility, and the attractions of Kensington Gardens could be feasted upon by a lover of Nature without fear of being disturbed by the presence of a fashionable mob. Godfrey could almost have sketched in Hyde Park, and the waiters at the hotel were so far more attentive than he had intended them to be, that he made up his mind not to linger in it more than one day.

During his wanderings on that day, his attention was attracted by a private boarding-house in the neighbourhood of Great Coram Street. It was as shabby as it was possible for a house of the kind to be, and the terms were certainly very inexpensive. And to listen to the high-flown account given by the lady who 'had seen better days,' but who now deigned to preside at the head of this establishment, it appeared that Wealth no longer had it all its own way in this world of ours. The amount of influence, quiet society, usefulness, amusement, and variety which a man of happy disposition might secure for himself by paying

a small sum of money for the treat of residing in that house proved that rich dullards were no longer to 'rule the roost,' as they had in former years.

Madame de Maurice proved to be the widow of a retired naval officer, and some of her envious female friends suggested that it was 'in no way consistent' to put a 'de' before her name, and that she had obviously no right to the title of 'madame.' But she was certainly affable. And such a tempting picture did she draw of retiring friends, who liked to be as quiet as Godfrey himself, but who by their looks, accomplishments, and conversation would adorn the rooms of any duchess in England; of the simple music in the evenings, the attractive little dinners, and luxurious easy-chairs afterwards, that Godfrey—reflecting like Milton of Mirth, 'these delights if thou canst give,'—decided that many a homeless wanderer might do worse than live with her. He certainly remembered with a sort of pang that finished household cleanliness had been a desideratum in that programme of comfort which

he had been wont to picture to himself with paradoxical complacency as 'living simply and self-denyingly' in the past. But beggars could not be choosers. And Matthew Arnold himself —supposing him to have a pocket which was rapidly becoming empty—might have been obliged to put up with a few Philistine atrocities, or even with a lack of 'lucidity' in his enforced companionship. Besides, as Godfrey reflected, no one would be likely to seek him out in a house of which the windows were rarely cleaned, and where the Venetian blinds had contracted so artistic a covering of dust that it was impossible to guess their original colour. To sleep in a stifling attic and to dine in a dingy parlour in this nondescript place, seemed to him far safer than to linger in any hotel. In this place he would have a breathing-space to look about him and determine what he would do next.

The dinners turned out to be badly cooked, and the society which he had been promised altogether dolorous.

But he was already beginning to arm himself

unconsciously with a new sort of callousness for these small disappointments, and was able to find a sort of attraction in studying the strange characters who would have been bruised like himself, in their battle with life, if they were not to a certain extent impervious.

To be sure the ladies in general were loquacious enough. There was Madame de Maurice, who appeared with untidy cap and yellow, wrinkled face while superintending the unappetising dinner by daylight, but who emerged like a gay moth out of a chrysalis in the evening, with plaits of hair of a different colour from those which she wore in the morning, and a *soupçon* (as she called it) of rouge on her cheeks, as a compliment to the inmates of the house. Then there was the old maid, who had been the beauty of a provincial town in her youth, and who liked, as madame explained, 'to keep it up' by introducing sentimental stories respecting her conquests in the past—anecdotes which generally could be skilfully 'led up to,' whenever there was a hiatus in

the talk at the dinner-table. She still sang sentimental songs, and accompanied herself on an old cracked piano, while a genuine young lady would stuff a pocket-handkerchief at the same time in her own little red mouth, and indulge in bursts of explosive laughter whenever she thought it safe to do so. The 'mamma' of this young lady allowed it to be an open secret that she had an object in going about from boarding-house to boarding-house, because —as she gave out in loud and pointed whispers —she thought it right that all young people should be allowed the opportunity of looking about them a little, otherwise how could one expect them to 'settle in life'?

There was an open competition between this girl and another who prematurely wore spectacles, talked of nothing else but the higher education for women, and gave out with clasped hands that she thought life was far too short for all one had to learn in it, and that she, for one, would 'never, *never* think of submitting to such a yoke of bondage as marriage.'

'Wait till you are asked, my dear,' retorted

her rival, with another little burst of sarcastic laughter.

But worst of all, perhaps, was the middle-aged, aggressive-looking woman, with red face and hair cropped short, who supposed that she had a mission for reforming the diet of mankind, and was in the habit of taking a subscription-list out of her pocket and handing it to everyone with a semi-defiant air.

The old men—Godfrey did not see any young ones—talked comparatively little. There was the respectable literary gentleman, of whom Madame de Maurice spoke with bated breath, who was supposed to edit some social magazine or newspaper—nobody exactly knew what—and who had a habit of gazing sublimely before him in mid-air, as if he were superior to all mundane concerns.

There was another old man, said to have great interest on the Stock Exchange (he had just retired from the head partnership of a haberdasher's shop), who snored away most of the evening in a comfortable arm-chair which, when he first saw the drawing-

room, had been one of the special attractions to Godfrey.

He invariably led the conversation to the subject of gout and sciatica and the advantage of wearing electric belts, but could discourse on no other subject. The other lodgers consisted of a sickly-looking, middle-aged man, respecting whom there was also an *on dit* that he was a great tragic actor; an unknown artist said to sell a number of his pictures in America—nobody heard much about his selling them anywhere else; and a spiritualist who was more mysterious than the others, because he always put his finger on his lips whenever anyone mentioned the subject of spiritualism, talked in an impressive style about séances, and said 'Hush,' in a solemn way, when anyone requested him to enter into detail.

Godfrey's impression after the first night was that he had entered a sort of lunatic asylum, but, on venturing to suggest this idea to the mild performer of tragedy, that oppressed-looking person was startled into answering,

'Oh, no. Of *course not, sir*—very respectable people here.'

'People out of the common?'

'That's it—people out of the common groove—as I should put it. Superior woman, very superior woman, sir, Madame de Maurice.'

The question did not seem to require an answer, and, as it was always vexing to Godfrey to stand in the attitude of a cynical judge of other people, he tried to accommodate himself as much as possible to the discordant elements of the somewhat eccentric phase of life into which he had been introduced. It was something to escape for a time from 'Society' (as Mrs. Austin called it) with its convenient hypocrisies and its bland untruths which he began to think were too often a mask for treachery and backbiting —something to be able to try his theories in a new atmosphere in which people were neither rich nor vain of their antecedents. If a cannon-ball, as he said to himself, had taken off one of the legs on which he had been accustomed to depend, why, the sooner he got used to a wooden substitute, the better.'

'"The necessity for pinching," as Charles Lamb says, "adds to the enjoyment of posses-

sion,"' he remarked, airily, that evening to the uncommunicative literary man who was said to edit a magazine, hoping to enlist his interest in a shabby copy of Wordsworth which he had just picked up at a book-stall.

'Charles Lamb got money for *his* mots,' growled the old fogey by way of answer, looking as usual straight in front of him with two bleared eyes which seemed to have been too hard at work to become accustomed to the sights of the world around him.

CHAPTER II.

If Godfrey did not make much progress in the good graces of his new friends at the boarding-house, he had a still more damping experience of the outside world. Vexation and disappointment such as he had encountered at Broadmeads were not likely to take a firm root in the nature of one so young. Even as he wrote to Vere Rashleigh, risking that rash prophecy about the possibility of 'making a name' for himself and offering it to her, he had been conscious of an upspringing of the heart to meet his altered circumstances. He had all the intense hopefulness of most young aspirants for literary fame, for after all he had little to depend upon but his pen. His violin-playing was useless for

making money, and he did not suppose there was any back-door for making his way into that which used to be called the 'sister art.' And even if he had exerted himself to take high honours at Oxford, which he had not, his change of name would have rendered such success practically useless.

He had at first said vaguely to himself that there were 'secretaryships, clerkships, and all sorts of appointments by which a properly educated man could earn bread-and-butter for himself.' But he had no introductions, no friends, and began to understand, after a few useless applications, the blunder of which he had been guilty.

It had rankled in his mind that Vere had misjudged him, and he did not like to 'be lumped with the rank and file,' who were worth nothing for their intrinsic merits, but were to be valued simply by the amount of worldly goods which had fallen to their share. But it soon appeared that the editors of London newspapers and magazines misjudged him also. On the second and third occasions when

his brain-children were 'returned with thanks,' he was collapsed as with a shock of cold water. He was one to be keenly alive to the atmosphere of censure, measuring himself very readily by the opinions of other men who had more experience than himself; and it was as if a blighting wind had passed over him, paralysing his energies. The latest poem, which had been dandled like the latest baby by a tender mother, was not returned to him at all. Probably it went into the editor's waste-paper-basket; and Godfrey—who needed a little approbation on which to prop his small remnant of self-appreciation—found himself all at once without a spur for his powers.

At St. Anne's, though he had been reticent as to speech, he had found satisfactory occupation for his pen. But the essays of which his college tutor had sometimes spoken in high terms of encouragement, and the poems which used often to find a corner in the columns of the undergraduates' magazine, were useless now, when, for the first time in his life, he

had intended to work his hardest at them.

Truth to tell, he had not been so assiduous at his studies in the past as to justify him in hoping for a sudden success. But at St. Anne's his surroundings had been congenial, and his faculties had developed with very little personal effort. It was very different from entering upon this new chrysalis stage, which had to be gone through in a chilling atmosphere, quite incompatible with the unfolding of deadened wings.

For the first time he saw how foolish he had been in breaking prematurely with his connections. He was too proud to apply to friends. To do so would not be compatible with the letter which he had written to his father. And though he soon began to think he was no better than the stupid herd, and that it would be impossible for him to establish a proper footing anywhere, yet he felt as if he would rather pay the penalty for all that he had forfeited—rather die than go back to the old state of things at Broadmeads. If his father had cared anything about him, he would have advertised

for the absentee. But no such advertisement had appeared in any of the daily papers. And Godfrey was perfectly certain that Reuben's pride would be as great as his own.

'He may marry again,' he said to himself. 'That is the likeliest thing for him to do. But he will never revoke a single word that he uttered to me. This sort of thing may pull a man about horribly, but he ought to defy it to break him,' he reflected, trying to rally himself from the depths of despondency, when a short MS. on one of the social subjects of the day—on which he had flattered himself he had really something to say worth hearing—was returned to him with the usual formula.

'I have no introductions; not time for sufficient thought. You mustn't shake a thing, if you want it to set into crystals; and here am I pounding my poor brains. I can take to wood carving, and then perhaps I shall have a chance to think a thing out, and may perhaps find a sale for my manual work.'

But the rebellious nerves and over-taxed head seemed to make the 'thinking' more

difficult than ever. He determined one day to take a walk for the walk's sake, since the absence of riding, of cricket, and of football—all the exercises with which he had used to brace a naturally delicate frame—were beginning to tell upon his health.

It was an October afternoon, misty and cold, and as he made his way towards the slums in which he knew he must presently seek for a lodging, since even Madame de Maurice's modest tariff would soon be utterly beyond his means, the thought of this great, overcrowded nest of human ants—in which he himself was only one amongst thousands of little, fussy, restless midgets hurrying hither and thither, each with its own fragmentary burden—became somewhat overpowering. By-and-by the sun would set, and other ants would come to carry *their* little particles of grain, and all this human restlessness would take some other form. A man ought to be myriad-eyed and myriad-hearted, if he were to feel for all the aggregate of sorrow, disappointment, bereavement, and despair going on in the great ant-hill at that

moment. So thought Godfrey, asking himself was there not a tendency in the self-seeking life which he had been obliged to lead of late to make a man gravitate lower, morally as well as mentally? He felt too weary and faint-hearted to be equal to any wide-sweeping flight of imagination. His own disappointments had certainly narrowed his horizon. But his thoughts reverted to Vere, who took the troubles of her neighbours to heart as if they had been her own. And a new idea occurred to him that as the old fogey in the boarding-house was said to be the editor of a *social* magazine, he might break through his reserve and offer to write for him. The land question, which was then comparatively new—though he could scarcely expect it to be understood by the slow-moving countrymen who were content to live and die as their fathers had done—was attractive to him.

And still more interesting was that greater question of promoting sympathy between man and man. If it was too much to hope that the present generation could reach by rapid strides

a perfect system of 'political jurisprudence,' class might surely draw nearer to class, and so might the consolidation of society be effected. These and a dozen other subjects occurred to Godfrey, as likely to be useful for essays. And he tried to draw the so-called editor into conversation. In this there was more difficulty than he had anticipated, as the somewhat surly literary lion insisted on gazing in a rapt way in front of him, and only glanced askance at his enthusiastic interrogator. When he spoke it was with a slight huskiness in his voice, and he said something, as if he had come down from the clouds, about the 'unsatisfactory nature of the commonly-accepted explanations of the problems of life.'

The lady who had a mission had overheard the last words, and commenced, in a loud, rasping voice,

'It would be as reasonable to look for grapes on thorns or figs on thistles, as for a strong, healthy body and a pure heart fed on innutritious, injudicious food. The impurely-fed body engenders every species of disease and——'

Madame de Maurice fidgeted nervously on her chair, and Mrs. Smythe, noticing it, proceeded condescendingly,

'I am trying to explain to these gentlemen that excess in diet is too often a form of starvation. You, my good friend, do not aim at excess. But, at the same time, if you could contribute to the Company which I am just now founding for the condensing of Swiss milk, you would never regret it. The advantages which we shall ensure for posterity are incalculable. Doctor Dawson—you do not know Doctor Dawson, do you?—he is one of the most celebrated medical men of these times. He said to me the other day, "Mrs. Smythe—you do not estimate the importance of your own mission"—the *gigantic* importance I think he said—"for——" Mr. Nicholson, Mr. Godfrey,' she suddenly exclaimed, observing signs of growing impatience amongst her hearers, 'may I ask you to do me the favour of looking again at this subscription list?'

But both the men had taken refuge on the landing outside the drawing-room.

'We must be liberal to women,' said Nicholson, speaking huskily, and looking straight into space still. 'For my part, I adopt the plan of never seeming to observe them. The race would not continue without them, but we must not expect too much from their mental faculties. I suppose you are a German scholar. Schopenhauer says——'

What Schopenhauer said about women Godfrey did not hear; for a strain of music began on the old cracked piano, which made him start and peer into the drawing-room. It was a part of Beethoven's 'Sonata Pathetique,' and the woman who played it, even on that worn-out instrument, brought sounds of ecstacy from the notes, as if her soul were rising above all the pettinesses and irritating meannesses of that narrow room.

'She teaches music—she's the actor's wife,' said Mr. Nicholson, contemptuously. 'I was going to observe that our review is not yet started. We need money for the undertaking.'

He took no notice of his companion's ingenu-

ous embarrassment; it was most likely that he did not see it.

'If we wish to build up, we must begin with demolition. You are acquainted with our views.'

Godfrey humbly observed that he was not.

'I need scarcely tell you that we have some of the most subtle and acute thinkers of the day among those who have promised us contributions. To explain our principles they are anti-mawworm.'

'Anti-mormon, or anti-nomian, did you say?' asked Godfrey, who did not catch the word.

Mr. Nicholson gave him a withering glance.

'To put the thing shortly, we make a clean sweep of the hypocrites—we scorn the conventional masquerades which others look upon as venial—parsons, for instance—especially bishops.'

'Oh, I see,' said Godfrey, disconcerted, 'I should say that the parsons were some of the best people going, and that it would be im-

possible to find anywhere a body of harder working, more self-sacrificing men than the bishops.'

'You are at liberty to hold your own opinions, sir. As society is constituted at present, no one can prosecute you for your mawworm ideas,' said Mr. Nicholson, in great wrath. 'You will please to remember that it was *you* who entered into this conversation, and proposed yourself as a writer for our social review.'

'As I understand it, the social review has not come into being. I will have nothing to do with attempting to break a link of that chain which binds the affections of the English people to a noble and humanizing institution like the Established Church,' answered Godfrey, a little hotly.

'That is, you will talk about the progress of the species, and attack the little fry, but have no hits at the big guns,' retorted the other, scornfully.

'Meaning the bishops?' asked Godfrey, with a laugh, 'I don't flatter myself that my hits

would be likely to affect them in the least in one way or another.'

'Much *you* know about social reform.'

'I never thought that I did know much,' answered Godfrey, as he reflected that it was one thing to sympathise with the divine wrath of such reformers as Savonarola, even to the extent of letting one's own life be burnt up with the wrong, and quite another to go about like a maniac rooting up all that was beneficial under pretext of destroying noxious weeds. He had made another enemy, which he could ill afford to do.

But after a time there came a little turn for him in the wheel of fortune. Not only did he obtain a small clerkship at a bank which occupied him during the day, but a minor magazine, entitled the *Family Enlightener*—in writing for which he flattered himself he could be of some use to the people—accepted some of his smaller articles. At one time it would have seemed to him intolerable to be obliged to turn himself into a reckoning machine in which the mind of a man must after a time be wrecked or

suffer loss, but now the bread-getting had become so much of a necessity that there was no longer time for indulging in fastidiousness.

CHAPTER III.

'I MUST dare to be myself and to follow out my own bent,' Godfrey had said to Mr. Nicholson when he declined to write for his periodical—which by the way never was started. But a duller or an uglier life it would have been impossible to imagine. To get out of bed betimes on a cold morning, to swallow down some bad coffee which has only just been made and consequently scalds one's throat, to ride on the top of an omnibus in a depressing fog, and only to reach one's destination in the city in the nick of time so as to escape what the other clerks called a 'wigging,' to be subjected daily to a sort of work which involved pressure, anxiety, hurry, and so much expenditure of brain and

nerve-force, and then to return in the evening to toil till past midnight at the fabrication of moral essays which could not please the editor of the *Enlightener* unless they were the very quintessence of commonplace.

Night by night, with a compunction which availed him nothing, Godfrey had to turn out a little string of the mildest platitudes. Anything of a sterner and more daring nature was invariably returned to him, and became so much waste-paper. He had to address himself to the 'gallery,' and it soon appeared that the gallery liked thin and watery jokes mixed with a little good-tempered philanthropy. He found that the right thing was not to be afraid of boring his readers, but to repeat the same opinion or sentiment in a hundred different ways. No barrister had to be plainer when addressing himself to the capacity of a common jury. It is exhausting work to have to burn the midnight oil proving to one's readers that two and two make four, especially when a man has to be up by daylight, and to break his back over a desk at another weary process of calcu-

lation. Life held many prizes, but it seemed to the poor fellow, in these dark, wintry days, as if she held none at all for him.

Other men had companions, but he was frightfully alone in the great city, with no single friend. A sigh would sometimes escape him when he thought that, had Vere Rashleigh been of lowly rank, she might have sympathised with him and helped him in the poverty and the struggle with some sense of blessed companionship.

A single word would have answered his father. But, if it was to come over again, that answer would be 'No.' He sometimes thought that he had been wrong in hiding himself and dropping his surname, so as to cut himself off from the friends of his boyhood. More than once he had caught sight of one of his Oxford acquaintances, and had felt a little like Adam exiled by his own fault from a home which was as luxurious as a Paradise, but which he had somehow not appreciated, as he hurried on, looking, like old Nicholson, straight before him, hoping that no one would recognise him in his shabby clothes.

The only stimulant which he ever had for his jaded palate—amongst the charlatans and sentimentalists at Madame de Maurice's—was the music which now and again was played by Mrs. Shelton, the actor's wife. She had ear, feeling, passion, and though the voice was wanting, and the execution might scarcely have satisfied a modern audience, her music was so distinctly different from the jingling and strumming of other women that he wondered it was not more known and better remunerated.

'The fellow who eats his bread in the sweat of his brow, and helps his neighbours who do likewise, can scarcely be the better for a tendency to philosophise,' he said, sadly, to himself one night.

And yet his pitifulness was growing stronger day after day for those other strugglers in the battle of life who were being worsted by his side, few of them having any idea of the unfathomable endowment of their individual souls, or a belief that God's eye was on them in their toil.

'They have enough to do to procure the barest necessaries of this material life. Even Mrs. Shelton, whose music can only take her to the threshold of what is better, and poor Nicholson, who argues that humanity has been injured by striving after a will-o'-the-wisp-like immortality, or Madame de Maurice, who contentedly paints her face every evening and surveys all the questions which trouble the world with more or less equanimity—they are all alike in one respect: they have little thought for anything beyond the dreary present.'

Never had Godfrey realised before how little opportunity for serious thought of any kind there was, not only in the lives of the poorest people, but also in those of the lower middle class. He had often, in his previous life, been startled, as other people were, at hearing of the real state of the 'slums' in London, and could understand how a rich man was now and then glad to relieve his conscience by sending a cheque to some institution, and inquiring as little as possible about matters which his instincts told him had better not be stirred

overmuch. And, without wishing to indulge in pessimism or undue sentimentalism about the state of the labouring class at Broadmeads, he had recognised the true proportions of the difficulty, and had disdained the money which was to make him important at the expense of the sufferings of others.

But he was conscious of no glories, fabulous or otherwise, connected with the toil for daily bread and the life which he was now leading at Madame de Maurice's boarding-house. Instead of stepping as a matter of course into an intellectual heritage, he was conscious of having to contend daily with the poorer side of his nature. The people with whom he associated had not only no time for church-going, but no time for self-recollection. The majority of them were humbugs, and the others ground down as he was himself, just as a steam-engine might be worn out by the incessant wear and tear of crank, and wheel, and boiler.

'Oh! for a little rest,' sighed Godfrey to himself, 'for the sight of a green field—some release from this perpetual harness.'

The poetical and emotional side of the man's nature inclined him to think sceptically, almost cynically, of the perpetual panegyric of work of which the world had heard too much. He was beginning to be over-tired by severe strain and mental effort, tossed about and ground out of shape like a poor waif of useless seaweed in the unfathomable depths of the ocean, carried hither and thither by the tide. He felt a pang of remorse when he acknowledged to himself how very small a portion of his time or thoughts he had been able to give to those benevolent schemes which had exercised him so much as to cause the first rupture with his father.

'A fine sort of Gracchus I should make, pretending to take up the cause of the people when I have hard work to get my daily bread, with melancholy on the point of marking me for her own,' he said, mockingly, to himself. 'I must get out of this. I am doing no good by this treadmill labour to anyone else, and the work is killing me—soul as well as body.'

He tried to rally himself from nervous suffering by recollecting a treatise of Kant's—which

he had come across when he happened to be reading for 'Greats'—on 'The power of the mind to master, by sheer resolution, the diseased feelings of the body.' But the philosophy proved to be worse than useless, and he ended by spending some of his last shillings in consulting a doctor.

The doctor's opinion was decisive. The patient was ordered a rest—rest in the sense of change of employment, if not in actual cessation from work.

'Man is a mutable animal, and should be subjected to alternate emotions,' said the scientific adviser. 'Now, my good friend, all this nervous suffering is partly your own fault. This growth of your brain, while you starve the other parts of your body—exhausting your system—will take its revenge on you. You must keep the balance more even. Have a little fresh air, a little more recreation, a more generous diet, and you will need no medicine.'

Godfrey smiled to himself as he glanced at his threadbare coat, and paid the necessary fee.

One thing was certain, that he must give up the ill-paid clerkship, or the writing for the *Family Enlightener*, or possibly both. How, then, was he to live? The doctor's words had cheered him a little, just as stars come out in the sky when a man looks up at them from a deep well. Godfrey, as I said before, was sanguine as well as sensitive, and he suddenly thought that he had not made enough of his love for art. Mrs. Shelton's music—which had revealed to him, even in the miserable atmosphere of Madame de Maurice's, depths of which, in his happier life, he had had little conception—had disgusted him more than ever with his own feebler efforts on the violin.

But his painting! If he could only sell his little sketches for a few shillings apiece, after all he might get as much by them as by his miserable clerkship. At St. Anne's they had looked upon him as an artist in embryo. And though the very recollection of this had hitherto kept him from forcing his way into Art—since he had not sufficient vanity to think he could enter its domain without undergoing a long

course of training—he now began to think of it as a change of employment. The vicissitudes of fortune had made him so much more modest that he thought, if he could only paint pictures which he could sell at the rate of half-a-crown each, there would be the joy of self-forgetfulness in producing these things, and the work might be lightened by the philanthropic fancy of supplying something which might be within the reach of those poorer 'Philistines,' the masses of whom doubtless needed some refining and elevating agent.

There was the artist at Madame de Maurice's —a Mr. Paul Hunter, who at first had seemed a trifle cold and unapproachable, but who had improved on acquaintance—perhaps he could give some hints. Hunter was more genial than Godfrey had expected. He styled himself an 'assistant commissioner,' and said, with a laugh at his own expense,

'I belong to the despised branch of the profession. But I used to have a friend who painted figures into my landscapes, always preferring to do the backs. The poor wretch died

from overwork. If you think you can have a try at it—there'll be no harm done.'

Hunter—who liked to keep up a delusion about his paintings—proved to be the producer of a number of tolerably capable drawings. He never dreamt of attempting a masterpiece, and his landscapes had all the faults of artificiality and rapid drawing. None of them were realistic, and all went for a low price. The conventional grace of his sylvan scenes, and the ordered pomp of his sunset skies—all more or less manufactured on the same ideals—would have called up a smile on Godfrey's face at any other time. But the artist was shrewd enough to see that the stranger had reached a feverish crisis of his life, a crisis that he had seen approaching inch-by-inch during the last few months.

'You see I have no friends,' Godfrey explained, with a simplicity and want of reserve which was scarcely wise under the circumstances, 'and my gifts are scarcely of the bread-winning sort.'

With the tough, mechanical difficulties of oil-painting he had never properly grappled;

but necessity is a stern mistress, and the delight of giving up the hated clerkship seemed to gift his fingers with unwonted cunning.

The 'backs' of the figures proved to be so satisfactory that Hunter—who hated this part of the work—offered a modicum at once.

'I have not had sufficient training,' said Godfrey, humbly.

'Oh! I don't believe in that,' said his new friend, encouragingly. 'Phidias never learnt. Half the anatomy of the R.A.'s is said to be at fault. Chemistry was never required to produce the colours with which Raphael painted. Michael Angelo never practised freehand—you stick to what I tell you; you'll do well enough.'

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The partnership went on jauntily, but Godfrey had to move to lodgings in a lower neighbourhood, where for a time he slept more soundly with some of his bewildering uncertainties and forebodings at an end; but soon realised that, instead of his diet being better, he would have to take to potatoes and dripping, with a flavour of Yarmouth bloaters. The

small cheques from the *Enlightener* had not come in as steadily as usual. It was becoming painfully apparent that this 'family paper' did not make its way in the public favour. And though Godfrey still fagged like a galley-slave for his new task-master, working-in the ground colours of all Hunter's pictures, and a good deal of the detail as well as the figures, there was apparently a plethora of these productions in the market. At one time, however, there came an order from a rich Australian, at another from an American. The bright idea occurred to Hunter that as etching was in fashion, and as it was an obvious disadvantage to himself, in whom the sense of colour was strong and keen, to take to black and white, his partner might try etching, as well as the other laborious parts of the joint trade. Manifold and delicate were the gradations which had to be employed in the black and white, and weary became the hand which laboured over them. Godfrey looked at them with a sigh when Hunter praised them. Freedom of line and spontaneity of touch were

naturally wanting in them. Alas! they had to be produced like the essays for the *Enlightener* at so much a yard.

'I used to think,' he said one day, with one of those sarcastic smiles at his own expense, with which he had to swallow down the dripping and potatoes, 'I used to think that pictures were the waking dreams of men, in which they tried to give their neighbours some idea of the visions which had been vouchsafed to them of the Unseen. I have no doubt that every artist sees differently. Colour always is a delusion. One man has a good eye for blue, another for red, and so forth. If one could get into the innermost sanctuary of somebody else's mind, what a revelation it would be. But I have no time for such thoughts now. Hunter is only an artist's fag, and I am less still—I am Hunter's fag.'

PART VI.

Oh, my heart is sick a-wishing and a-waiting,
The lad took up his knapsack, he went, he went his way ;
And I looked on for his coming, as a prisoner through the grating
Looks, and longs, and longs, and wishes for the opening day.

JEAN INGELOW.

CHAPTER I.

Drip, drip, drip went the rain at Broadmeads towards the close of that August when Godfrey had so suddenly taken his father at his word, and set out to lose himself in what the Torringmoor old ladies called sentimentally the 'Great Babylon.' The drip of the continued rain settled on the corn which was already cut in the fields, searching into its pith and marrow. There was no harvesting to be done while the dismal weather continued. Even when the wheat could be garnered, it would be sure to be damaged, and the yield of the year could not fail to be ruinously small for the farmer.

Sir Ralph Rashleigh stood looking gloomily out of the window of the breakfast-room at the

dismal prospect, as if he saw the gaunt phantom of poverty standing before him, which indeed, to speak figuratively, he did. For the two neighbours were now—to use the expression of the common people round them—'at daggers drawn.' Reuben Sellwood had not meant to force a quarrel when he upbraided Sir Ralph with his niece's pride. It was as if the words sprang from his lips without his will; and, though the baronet made an heroic effort to restrain his own temper which he was rapidly losing, there could never afterwards be even an appearance of courtesy kept up between the two men. No thought of real friendship had ever indeed been generated in the baronet's mind, but the horror which he had ever had of eating this man's bread and condescending to accept his favours, was greatly increased by Reuben's furious manner during the interview.

'The fellow cursed everything in heaven and earth—he talked as if he was cousin-german to the fiend incarnate,' he said afterwards, in justification of his niece's conduct.

In the bottom of his heart he bitterly felt

that Vere had neglected his interests in refusing to be the link which was to join the two territories; and as the days passed on, and Reuben's son did not return to him, but seemed as if he had really left his home determined to fight-on in a hostile way opposed to his father's wishes, Sir Ralph could not help being sorry that the girl had taken any part in the tragedy.

He remembered that the fellow had had a melancholy way of seeming to disregard the good things which had fallen to his lot in life, as if he were above them all. He remembered, too, the young man's delicate appearance, with fair complexion and blue eyes like a maiden's. He certainly did not look the sort of man to bear hard, unremitting toil, and to clench the nails into any sort of finished work.

'He will come back. He will change his mind,' he said, one day to Vere.

This hypothetical optimism she knew to be vain. She only shook her head.

'He will never change his mind.'

'There will be nothing for him to do without introductions in London. And if he has changed his name, and given up all the benefits of his University training, the fellow is a fool.'

'He is not by any means a fool,' said Vere, speaking quietly, 'but the wisest man cannot be content to do what fools can do sometimes.'

'You mean to say he will take what common men may do?' Sir Ralph shrugged.

'Why not? There is nothing derogatory in work—if I had been a man now——'

Her voice was vehement and a little bitter, but she broke off in her speech, remembering how she sometimes reproached herself for not having better received her uncle's confidences.

'Why should she feel so unutterably desolate? She had refused the man, and could not help the consequences of her refusal. It was not logical,' she said to herself, at times.

Strangely enough her uncle did not reproach her with being too precipitate. His prospects as she knew were inexpressibly cheerless. She began to think that she had behaved scanda-

lously, if not dishonourably to him as well as to Godfrey. But these ideas came too late. Unfortunately it was a part of this girl's character to have the impulse of expansive tenderness when the occasion for it was past. Over and over again she tried to reason soberly with herself, seeing as plainly as ever that any fate would have been preferable to that of commencing a married life with a sort of utilitarian contract which would be likely to rouse anatagonism; and that nothing in all the world would have been so terrible as to add one more to those unhappy cases of a man and woman bound together by an indissoluble bond when neither could have any pity or sympathy for the other.

'I did right,' she said to herself, 'I would do the same if it were to come over again.'

But unfortunately the exalted mood in which she had at first felt strung up to the highest pitch could not last without reaction. It might have softened the blow to Godfrey if he could have known that she sometimes burst into convulsive sobs in the privacy of her own room.

'Oh, I could not help it, but I must have seemed so ill-tempered, so hard, so unsympathetic,' she said to herself, as tears fell fast and thick, and seemed to relieve the feeling of wild indignation so unusual with her, who rarely yielded to passion. 'I could not have thought it possible I should turn into such a virago,' she repeated more than once when, trying to ease the mental pain by physical exertion, she tramped as before through the muddy lanes, ministering to the wants of her poorer friends. But by degrees a new apathy seemed to come over her.

'It—it has lost me a friend,' she said, 'I hadn't counted upon *that*. He was better than any friend I ever had before.'

She did not even then comprehend how anxious she was about Godfrey's fate, nor the necessity for loving which had been awakened in her too late.

Her uncle's conduct helped to open her eyes. Having nothing else to comfort him, he tried in an icy way to soothe himself with the oft-repeated declaration that he ought to have

known a Rashleigh would have had too much spirit to submit to an alliance with the son of a neighbouring upstart. It took Vere's breath away to hear him speak of the marriage now as of a thing to which he could never have given his approval.

The reserve and hauteur had returned to his manner, and he confronted Reuben when he met him with a look of cold dismissal. The whole transaction was one which he would willingly have forgotten, and it was almost absurd to see him trying to resume his place amongst those social idols which are balanced so high that it is difficult for them to maintain their balance without tottering.

Sir Ralph's outlook for the future was dismal enough, and his daughter felt a little ashamed when she saw the efforts which he still made to stand correctly poised at a dignified eminence, while the life that he led was almost as devoid of luxury as that of Stylites on his pillar. The attempt was somewhat contemptible to Vere, who tried to calm herself by realising as she had never realised before, the small importance

of her own short life and her trifling mistakes, compared with the immensity of life around her.

'Pride is a mean thing,' she acknowledged to herself, 'and one of its meanest ways is to think itself grand.'

'The Infinite! if I had only thought what that meant,' she reflected, another day, in the same strain of thought. 'I should surely have had more humility.'

She had no one to teach her. But she began to ask herself with some compunction if her behaviour had been free from fault when she had acted as her own self-will had dictated to her. She thought pitifully not only of her own uncle, but of the other lonely man in the neighbouring house in a 'wilderness-state' of loneliness and desolation, for which her own conduct might be partially to blame. Since Godfrey had taken her at her word, she was almost as lonely as his father. But she was learning to pray, while Reuben was cursing—the whole experience being not without fruit to her spiritual life.

The days dragged their slow length into weeks, and the weeks into months, but no

news had been heard of Godfrey. Reuben, winding himself up into a pitch of further anger, refused to advertise or to take any efforts to recall him.

'I told him I washed my hands o' him, and I meant it. What manner of man is he? I fed him, educated him, and brought him up i' luxury, and this be the return he makes me. It is vile ingratitude,' thundered Reuben. In the visions of the night he saw the young fellow looking pale and thin, and remembered how he had sworn to his dead mother, 'I'll always stand by him and help him. The lad 'ill never ha' to contend wi' ill fortune as I have done.'

But Reuben did not believe in dreams any more than he believed in the pains of hell or the joys of the blessed. All was naked and open to him, since he had eaten but little of the tree of knowledge. He thought he could fathom with his limited intelligence all the problems of life in the past and present, as well as its possibilities in the future. His assumption of omniscience might be a little funny, but the land of vague shadows seemed to him to be

the inheritance of the poet. And poets were to be despised and pitied.

Had not his lad had something of the poetic temperament? To natures as weak as Godfrey's, he would leave it to feel the pressure of the hand that was dead for ever, and the echo of the footstep that would never be heard again. Now that his son had left him, he saw how the antagonism had been great between them, and how there had not been one drop of the oil of mutual understanding to make their mutual relations work more smoothly.

He seldom ventured out now beyond his grounds, but once when he did so he met Vere Rashleigh, dressed as simply as ever, and with a new humility in her way of carrying herself.

She was determined to go out, not being one of those women who shut themselves up with any sorrow and nurse it. The whole neighbourhood had been ringing with different versions of her conduct as connected with the mysterious disappearance of young Sellwood. But it was a part of Vere's disposition not to

care in the least for what anybody might think.

She had received her little note from Godfrey about that time, and a new sort of joy had sprung up in her heart as she repeated to herself,

'He loves me—he bears me no grudge and he has shown that he forgives me by giving me something to do.'

'Be kind to my father,' he had written to her. Was not the injunction an absurd impossibility? She feared so. As she passed his now forbidding-looking father, she tried to smile with a nervous trembling of her lip.

'Curse her!' the unhappy man muttered to himself, with that thirst for vengence which had been so inscrutable to Godfrey, vulgarising the higher attributes of his father's nature, and rendering his very motives unintelligible.

But, as Reuben muttered the curse, even his duller perception could not fail to make him notice the look of dumb sorrow on the girl's face. There was an appealing look, also, more difficult to interpret. Could he have under-

stood that look aright, he would have seen that there was anxious questioning in her large eyes, an expression of doubt which, without any intention on her part, seemed to say, 'What is he? Where does he come from? Are the stories which they tell about him true?' as—fearing still that the task which Godfrey had given her would be for ever too difficult, and that no one of the weaker sex could venture to interfere with this man of iron—she passed on.

'Others as young as I am have suffered far more—of course I knew that my turn would come—there is nothing for me to complain of,' she thought, in almost the same words which Godfrey had used of himself. She had always been one of those who take readily to self-sacrifice, and can scarcely think of good, as concerns self, apart from the good of others. This tendency made her liable to self-reproach, and it was with a feeling of numbness about her heart that she asked herself now, 'Were there not countless Rubicons of hasty words, rash impulses, and unwise resolves which people—

penitent like herself—could never cross again? We cannot live our lives over again. Regret may prevent mistakes in the future, but I don't see how it can help us about the past. And yet suppose any post or newspaper brought the news that Godfrey was dead—should I not feel guilty of manslaughter, and should I not be too severely punished?'

'I am so young,' she muttered again to herself. 'But was *he* not just beginning his life as well? And they know nothing about it—they can never guess that I really cared for him.'

By an energetic effort of her will, she determined again not to show herself weak. Had she not heard that if we try to bear ourselves bravely, and to do our little tasks of work industriously, the daily commonplaces of life will become more insignificant and the little woes of life dwindle into nothingness? She told herself that nothing should make her morbid, but there was little to help the young philosopher just then in the dark and dreary outlook of her life.

Sir Ralph's icy manner to her had become harder to bear than ever. He did not even ask her to read aloud to him. He had his meals at times in his own apartments, and, when he met his niece in the evenings, he spoke no more than was absolutely necessary. If the life before her had not been so small and dry, it might not have been so hard for her to get through it. But Vere was not one of those people who find a martyrdom for themselves in the violation of natural law, profiting no one, helping no one. The determination not to be sentimental helped her to fight against the feeling that everything had grown nauseous to her, every dish, every dress. The environments of her life were meagre and dull enough, but even had they been comfortable and splendid she would have derived no happiness from the comfort or splendour at the expense of Godfrey's self-immolation.

She was rather glad that she had no pretty boudoir, as its right use, according to the derivation of the word, was said to be for sulking; rather glad too that she could devote herself

to the education of her cousin, who had lately taken to growing, and whose lank girlhood seemed to herald the fuller development of womanhood. And she would have been wholly glad if her uncle could have been made to see that his loss of money would furnish her with some sort of excuse for helping him, also in some definite way, so as to escape the workings of restlessness and discontent.

There was a ring of triumph in her voice when she said to him one day, as if she rather liked the excuse for saying it,

'If we had only belonged to the middle class! *There*, they tell me, it is getting quite the fashion for girls like me to do something for themselves, and such a fancy would never be thought strange, or excite remark.'

'But we do *not* belong to the middle class,' answered her uncle, waking from his evident pre-occupation to answer her.

'Only it seems to me mortifying to waste the best years of one's life in doing nothing when one *could* help,' she answered, with a deliberate slowness of speech which showed that the sub-

ject was not new to her. The calmness of her voice had the effect of rousing Sir Ralph from his usual indifference and apparent inability to answer.

'Are *you* becoming a utilitarian democrat like our neighbour's promising heir?' he asked, lashed into sudden anger.

'Oh! I did not mean to vex you. I would not distress you for the world,' she answered, as she saw her days lengthening out interminably, and could almost find it in her to wish that the years, which seemed to be so tedious as they stretched out before her, were some of them over.

There was, at any rate, the guiding and orderly managing of the present rather assuming but poverty-stricken mansion. It required something like a stroke of genius to rule it with anything like a sense of beauty, combined with the needful thriftiness.

And, if Vere was forbidden to look out for any other outlet in her life, it calmed her strangely to think that the time would come sooner or later when the tiny spark, which she called her own

earthly life, would be quenched with its small difficulties—if only she had done her best with it.

But, as regarded Godfrey, there was the possibility of the Terrible, the Unknown overtaking him in some form of calamity, and the possibility seemed to haunt her.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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